The Players of London

Louise Beecher Chancellor

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The Players o' London

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A tale of an Elizabethian Smart Set

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PROLOGUE

OUR tale begins with the command "Make merry," from Good Queen Bess. At the height of her success and popularity, she is conscious of the gradual passing of her youth. Childhood has been sad; girlhood, oppressed by want and peril; young womanhood, weighed down by cares and responsibilities such as not seldom kill strong men. And now before old age destroys the power to enjoy, there is yet a little time. Let us then make merry!

* * *

There was like to be fun and frolic enough to go round. For the poor,

street pageants and processions would be free. So genial was the mood of the crowd that even unlicensed actors and acrobats ventured to practice their calling in the open streets, and though the sober Puritans looked askance, they dared not express their disapproval. Such disapproval might be misconstrued as disloyalty. The Queen was about to celebrate the thirty-seventh anniversary of her reign. Must not proper sympathy with the occasion include sympathy with even the most boisterous participators?

Outside the town limits, the theatres were prepared to offer the most popular tragedies and comedies of the time; for the fashion had been set at court, and it was heralded abroad that the actors of the Rose Theatre were to play for the Queen. The brilliant Earl of Leicester had been the first patron of this company, and during his

life the players had won great favor at court. At present they held their license from Hunsdon, the Queen's chamberlain, and their success still continued.

But while Elizabeth licensed a company of her own, which proudly bore the title of the Queen's Players, it was not likely that the selection of another group of actors for her amusement could give universal satisfaction. The Queen's Players were devoured with jealous rage; only fear of losing their license prevented a boisterous display of animosity against the chamberlain's company. Lord Hunsdon's men were hard to reach. They lodged within hailing distance of their theatre on the Bankside, Southwark. They were a group of devoted friends, and came and went in goodly numbers. There was no rivalry among them, and none of the disorder caused by indiscretion and *lêse majesté,* which so often

brought about the withdrawal of licenses from the other companies of the period, and all too frequently landed their performers in jail.

The resultant good standing of Lord Hunsdon's men made it unsafe for the Queen's Players to engage them in a brawl; the underlying motive would be too plain. And yet a vague rumor was abroad, hinting that there was trouble in store for the Lord Chamberlain's Players. Who was responsible for such a rumor, no one could tell; and what manner of calamity should befall, no one knew. But certain it is, that the day before the festivities, Philip Condell was ailing; and that on the morning of the seventeenth, he was ill of a fever.

Now, to be ill of a fever is common enough even in our times. Philip Condell had been a member of the company only a few weeks, and that he should be the one stricken down

seemed innocent enough. But to those of the inner circle, who understood that because of him a certain play had been selected, to those who had seen his lovely face and who knew that he was to play a woman's part, the fact that he should be stricken so suddenly was a proof of villainy; and more than one man felt that if he dared he could tell where the blame belonged.

The head of Lord Hunsdon's players at this time was the elder Burbage. He was fortunate enough to have in his company an assistant who relieved him of the duties of stage manager, and made it possible for him, while running the finest company in London, to devote most of his time to business ventures.

Burbage was interested in building and improving theatres, and ran a paying livery stable in connection with them. The young man who made

these outside enterprises possible was beginning to attract considerable attention by his writing of poems and plays. He was not a native Londoner, but had been driven by personal misfortunes to seek a living in the city. Though he entered Burbage's company in a humble capacity, his versatility soon made him invaluable. He was a veritable Jack-of-all-trades, and could turn from stage-carpentry to playwriting as easily as he could take the place of an absent musician or find the stone in a lame horse's foot. But if he excelled in one thing more than another, it was in making friends. His tact was so fine that, coming as an outsider into the company, he had worked his way into leadership without creating opposition or jealousy. While one of the foremost actors of his day, his physique was not equal to that of Richard Burbage, the manager's son; and he never encroached on

the latter's right to be called the leading tragedian of London.

In considering Master Will Shakspere intimately, one must realize the rare personal charm and the lovable characteristics that made his success possible. But for these qualities, he would have remained an alien and a countryman among his town-bred companions. No amount of genius alone could have surmounted that one insuperable barrier, lack of opportunity. His associates enjoyed him; therefore, they welcomed him and made way for him. Shakspere was liked before he was admired; he was loved before he was revered.

CHAPTER I

In which Lord Hunsdon's Players meet with an unforeseen calamity.

TO the lodgings of Master Will Shakspere came a hurried messenger at dawn on the Jubilee morning. He brought bad tidings. Philip Condell's condition was very

"Not from the stars do I my judgment pluck,
And yet methinks I have astronomy,
But not to tell of evil luck."

Sonnet XIV.

grave, and the two Burbages urgently commanded that Master Will should at once see what had best be done. It was evidently beyond their power to plan the next move.

"Have you a fast horse outside?" asked Will of the man.

"No, but the best in the stable is at your service. Master Burbage said that if you could think of anyone to take the part——"

"We must not waste time in such an effort," interrupted Shakspere. "How could one be found to take the leading part in a new play? My lines must be given. There is not a soul in London or in all England who can act the part of Juliet, save Philip Condell. For him the part was written. Moreover, it is his beauty that is to be my excuse at court for showing them a tragedy instead of the fun they love.

"Look now!" and he turned to the

messenger with great seriousness. "Will you carry out my commands without fail? We are disgraced and undone if aught goes amiss to-day!"

"But all has gone amiss!" groaned the fellow. "Lay it not to me!"

"Oh, you give up hope too soon! Success comes not that way. I have in mind a possible remedy for our trouble. John Florio, an Italian scholar, is now in attendance upon my Lord, the Earl of Southampton. With the store of classical knowledge in his brain is also much that is of wonderful use. He can send Philip a potion to help him through the day. I will write a brief letter, and do you get an audience with Signor Florio and explain to him fully the whole matter. You will find him at Whitehall, where my Lord attends the Queen during these festivities."

"And do you believe that he can ef-

fect a cure so speedily?" asked the man with some incredulity.

"If he cannot cure," assured Shakspere, "he can at least arrest the progress of the disease for a day or two. These Italians are as far ahead of us in science as they are in art and poetry. Signor Florio has a fluid, which I have tasted, a veritable water of life. I am convinced that it will support Philip through the day, and after that—let come what may!"

But though he had filled his emissary with sufficient enthusiasm to insure the faithful carrying out of the errand, Shakspere himself was far from satisfied with the prospect before him. He wrote the missive and bade the man make all possible haste, advising him to ride a certain roan mare that he knew to be fleet and sure-footed; his fondness for her had heretofore kept him from dwelling upon her good points to others.

He looked out of his window to be sure that the fellow was making haste, and felt satisfied to see him running in the direction of the stables. The hour was still early, and but few people were abroad. Yet Shakspere knew that on holidays folks bestir themselves betimes, and that the thoroughfares would soon be crowded; then the rider's chance for speed would be doubtful.

He proceeded to dress himself with the care that befitted the occasion, but his heart was heavy indeed. Here was the long expected day that should have brought the hour of his triumph. Now his only wish was that all might be over as quickly as possible.

"Cruel!" he muttered, "a dastardly cruel deed to aim a blow at that helpless boy! Burbage could better have been spared. I should have made shift to play Romeo. But the Juliet on whom I have set my heart, and for

whose face I have been thanking my fortunate star! It seems like striking a woman when the cowards turn against what is so fair and young! Poor child, he must wish that he had never left the Cathedral Choir to join such a set of rascals as the London players prove to be!"

CHAPTER II

In which a woman is unsuccessful

HALF an hour later the principal actors of the Rose Theatre were gathered in the narrow street in front of Philip Condell's lodgings. On the low doorstep stood a tall, handsome, pow-

"How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?"
Sonnet LXV.

erful man. He was facing the crowd and declaiming tragically. As Shakspere sauntered up from the direction of the Bear Garden near which he lived, the orator broke off his harangue and gave a shout:

"Hello! Hello! What news, Will? What are we to do?"

"You have the latest news!" answered the other. "What is the report from within?"

"Philip Condell is taken with the fever," replied Burbage. "The nurse says that he cannot play to-day, and his sister would not even let me see him. I announce, therefore, that the play is off. It would be impossible for me to go on with my part without his support."

A chorus of sighs and groans followed, but Thomas Armin spoke up hopefully:

"The play must be changed; let us give something else. Why not 'Mid-

summer Night's Dream'? It pleased Lord Bedford so well that the Queen could not take it amiss."

"Nay, now! My new play shall be played this night!" declared Shakspere convincingly. "Who supposes that I would demean her Majesty by producing a play that all the town knows was written for my Lord Bedford's wedding? This is no ordinary occasion! Our success to-day means not only our success as individuals, but as a company. More than that, it may mean the raising of our profession to the dignity that befits gentlemen. We are rising above the evil report that dubs us unstable roysterers. We are called to the highest presence in the land! Here is a chance for success and honor! And shall we let a rival troupe undo us and gloat over our defeat? Go up, Burbage, and bring Condell out to the light! Let us see how sick he is! The fresh air can do him no harm."

The speaker's words were followed by an astonished silence; without making any response, Burbage turned and re-entered the house. As he did so Tom Armin called out encouragingly:

"Thou art strong enough; he need not be afraid to trust thee!"

"Bring him down, or we shall go up for ourselves, to see how sick he is," spoke up Sly, "and whether he does right to run the chance of disgracing us."

"He might better play to-night and then die," announced the play-writer calmly. "But, Burbage," he added, "bring him down exceeding careful."

In an agony of suspense, Shakspere waited, his face pale with agitation, his nervous hands clenched. In his heart, he knew that his decision to present a tragedy before the fun-loving Queen was the height of audacity. To himself he had confessed from the first that he was taking a great risk. The

success of his new play at Court would mean his own personal success; it would justify the friendship of certain men in high places. With the deliberate intention of making a dramatic sensation, he had taken a popular Italian plot and put his whole soul into it, counting on Philip's exquisite rendering of Juliet, and Burbage's impassioned acting of Romeo to take the Court by storm. The egotism of genius now caused him to feel that the success of his effort must be secured at any cost; in comparison with this success, nothing else seemed of consequence.

Meanwhile, the stalwart Burbage ascended the stairs, and entered a small room with a sunny window that overlooked the street.

A young woman was looking through the shutters at the little crowd below. When Burbage entered, she

sprang between him and a door at the side of the room, crying wrathfully:

"You shall not have him!"

The man folded his arms with an air of patient endurance, but said nothing.

The girl kept her post.

"My brother is not a slave!" she exclaimed, flashing indignant dark eyes on the intruder. "Pray tell me, is his present calling deemed so low that he may be jested with while dying?"

"Most fair lady," responded the other, "I should be sad, indeed, did I believe your brother to be fighting with death! The height of his fever will not be reached for several days, and we who are actors believe it would only ease his mind to go through the part on which his mind is set. In any case, we insist on judging for ourselves whether or not he is able to go with us. For Philip's own sake, every effort must be made so that he may return Lord Hunsdon's license, which would

certainly be revoked, if through him the Queen's performance should prove a misadventure. In that case, not only will he be ruined, but all his fellow-players will share the disgrace. Now, see! This at least is true: if we take him with us, we can begin the play; and if he faint or fail before the Queen, we have a man among us who will spin off such a sonnet as will overcome her old heart with rapture! Cynthia's fair beams will have cast a spell over her humble servitor, who swoons at sight of her beauty!"

"Her beauty! I thought the Queen too old for beauty!"

"Ah, sweet Phyllis, Majesty is never old, and Majesty is always beautiful."

"Oh, how he has been rejoicing in this opportunity!" exclaimed the girl. "To play for the Queen! He has been living for weeks in the hope of this very chance. How perfectly he gave

the lines! How beautiful he looked! And oh, to think of his losing all!"

"He must not!" responded Burbage. Now, fond sister that you are, help the old nurse to dress our dear Philip, and then trust him to me. I will guard him so that even his twin sister Phyllis need have no fear for him. I will carry him as tenderly as though he were of spun glass."

The girl shook her head sorrowfully. "You do not know how sick he is," she said. "And yet—to ruin his life when his future is so full of promise! Oh, I know not what to do!" Her eyes filled with tears.

"He must come with me," said Burbage.

She turned a pale face to him and exclaimed breathlessly:

"You would be very kind—and good?"

"I swear it!" he answered.

She walked slowly to the inner door,

and Burbage eyed with wonder the two long braids of black hair which fell like thick ropes almost to the hem of her dress. He thought half indignantly of the inferior beauty of Mistress Vernon's hair, which was one of the Court sensations.

Phyllis passed into her brother's room and closed the door behind her. Though the heavy stone walls made it impossible for words to be heard from one room to the next, the actor felt the scene that was taking place so near him. He could see in imagination the despairing quiver of the girl's lips, and the tears, kept back in his presence, that now brimmed over while she attired her beloved brother, as for sacrifice.

CHAPTER III

In which Philip is encouraged to make an effort

THE doorway was watched eagerly by the group of men whose fortune was at stake, and when at last Richard Burbage appeared, carrying their missing comrade, a

"And him as for a map doth Nature store
To show false Art what beauty was of yore."
Sonnet LVVIII.

sigh of relief went up as from a single man.

Will Shakspere pressed hurriedly forward and seized one of the boy's limp hands. He felt the pulse-beat, and then touched Philip's forehead with his palm, the better to judge the height of the fever. The look of the face disturbed him. Philip's eyes were large and wild. His soft dark hair emphasized the clearness of his skin, which was like ivory except where the cheeks glowed crimson with fever.

"Disease, how beautiful thou art!" exclaimed Master Will. "Burbage, he will look the woman, will he not? But, oh Lord! How sick he must be to show so red and white! Is he conscious? Does he know us at all? Philip, do you remember me? Who is it?"

"It is the lark, the herald of the morn," murmured the boy, closing his eyes with a faint smile.

At the reply, a shout of delight arose.

"If he can quote from the play as well as that, he can act. Eh, fellows?" asked Burbage. "What say you? He does not rave who calls our songster a lark!"

"Huzza!" cried the players, as their prize was carried off in triumph.

Burbage and the young actor kept up a stream of tender assurances and encouraging words.

"I shall prove a better physician than that you have left," whispered Burbage. "Sister Phyllis is far too exciting as a nurse, and the old aunt is enough to scare a sick man into the grave. We shall do well by you, Philip! Do you rest comfortably on my shoulder? Lie quiet, I feel you no more than a feather's weight. You wanted to come with us, did you not?"

"You came to save my name and to make my romance immortal!" ex-

claimed Will Shakspere tenderly. "I shall look to you as to the apple of my eye. Anything you need, you have but to whisper to me. I will rock you to sleep in my arms or tell you stories the night through, so you do not fail me in this! Can you go through with it, Philip? I have sent to the Palace for a potion that will help you."

"Peace, peace!" murmured the boy wearily. "My brain is seething!"

It was now toward nine o'clock in the morning, and a rehearsal was called at the Rose before the company should march to Whitehall. There the hour for the performance had not been set, and the players would await the Queen's pleasure.

Shakspere was in torture between hope and fear. Would Philip's strength hold out until the message returned from Whitehall? And why was the man so long? He suggested that the boy should save himself from

fatigue by omitting all the long passages and giving only the cues; but Philip said that such a course would only confuse him, while it could not inspire the rest of the cast.

"Your patience, gentlemen, and I think I can get through the day," he added with a courage that was new to him.

Philip Condell had always been somewhat shy and timid, but now, though he clung like a sick child to the two who had made him their special charge, he showed considerable pluck.

As the rehearsal progressed, a new charm was discovered in him, a certain beauty and delicacy born of his illness. His failure to remember the proper exits and entrances, and his hesitation in regard to the stage business would ordinarily have called down a storm of rebuke on his head, for Shakspere was an exacting master. But now all was tender consideration. Joy welled in

the poet's breast as it became apparent that whatever else was forgotten, the boy remembered the lines he had learned so thoroughly previous to his illness. There was no hesitation, and the words came clear and sweet. How exquisite the voice! How tender the love scenes! How awful the tragedy!

"He has been near the other world," whispered one; "the spirits have taught him!"

"Oh, Philip, only do as well at Court!" entreated Burbage.

But Shakspere flung his arms around the boy's neck and kissed him. "Truly, I have made a pretty part for you," he said, "and only Juliet's death insures my forgiveness for showing the Court how lovely a woman might be!"

They sat down on the edge of the stage so that Philip could rest while the procession was forming to march to the Palace.

"Tell me, Shakspere," said the boy,

taking his friend's hand affectionately, "how did you so well know what a woman would say and do?"

Shakspere's keen eyes clouded.

"It is not what she would say and do —it is only what she ought to say and do. Women never do as they ought except in my plays!" he added, bitterly.

Philip closed his eyes with a sigh, and the long dark lashes swept his cheek.

"I hope that is untrue," he said at last, "but even in these plays of yours do the men and women suit you? Foolish Romeo loving Rosaline and killing himself a few days later for Juliet!"

"Simpleton, a man may love a thousand times as Romeo loved Rosaline! He can love only once as Romeo loved Juliet! Do you understand?"

The boy's cheeks flushed, but he continued audaciously: "Why his haste? A little more patience, and they might

have been united, the happiest of lovers!"

"The happiest? Those that love and die young! Their union is more perfect in death than it could ever be in life!"

"No, no, Will Shakspere! My heart breaks for Juliet! Why does she not flee with Romeo to share his banishment in Mantua? It is what I would have done!"

"What you would have done, my sweet boy? Why, Juliet was a lady! She had the courage to face death, but not disgrace. We must not ask that of woman, it is a doubtful virtue."

The players were now ready to march to Whitehall, each one made gay in a scarlet silk cloak. These cloaks, presented by the Queen, were nothing more than wide scarfs, and were worn folded around the body with an end flowing loose from the left shoulder. Philip trembled as he stood

up to be draped in the garment. Burbage had secured a sedan chair for him to ride in, but the boy grew paler and paler each moment, and when he was about to step in, he turned half fainting toward Shakspere.

"I cannot go!" he gasped. "Strength fails me!"

No sympathy came from that quarter.

"Shame upon you! Here you have been chattering to me like a magpie when your tongue should have had a rest. I believe you are more frightened than sick! You act like a very girl! Fainting, indeed, at such a time as this! Here, Sly, some liquor to hearten this babe!

"Burbage, for God's sake, see if that man has returned from Whitehall! I could have come and gone twenty times in this space. He may be waiting at my lodgings. Send there and to the stables."

For a few minutes, all was excitement. Sly hurried in with a cup of warm Malmsey wine, and Burbage returned with a small phial, which he slipped into Shakspere's hand, unobserved. The contents were emptied into the cup of wine, and then the whole was poured down Philip's unwilling throat. It must have been a strong dose, for tears of indignant protest were forced from his eyes. Then, coughing and sputtering, he was hustled into the chair without further ceremony.

"Lock the door, now that our bird is safe inside," advised Shakspere.

Burbage turned the key.

"I believe he would run away if he had the power," he said. "He acts like one bewitched."

"Yes," replied Shakspere, "and it is not hard to guess whose poison has bewitched him. They knew my hopes were pinned on this boy."

"The poison is somewhat slow of working."

"The boy drinks less than we. He has not had enough to kill him. A few more drams would have done it. But we look well after our fellows, Burbage. We shall pull him through."

HBI

CHAPTER

IV

In which we meet an Earl and a Mother.

THE procession now issued from the main door of the theatre, where a throng of people waited to see the fortunate men selected to provide amusement for the

"Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee
Calls back the lovely April of her prime."

Sonnet III.

Queen. Many a friendly greeting was shouted, and many an exclamation of admiration was called forth by the beautiful costumes of the players; for Lord Hunsdon's retinue went bravely attired.

On the next corner, a number of rival actors from The Curtain has assembled with a few unpleasant missiles concealed under their doublets. These were intended for Philip; the ill-natured fellows rightly judged that some old eggs and vegetables would take the courage out of him, and might even bring tears to his girl face. He was no expert at managing a sword or any other weapon, and there was nothing to fear from him.

But while they waited for the boy, the procession passed on, and the occupant of the sedan chair slept. Had Philip been sitting upright, he would have been discovered; but he had curled down in the bottom of the chair,

his head resting on the cushioned seat. The steady tread of the bearers caused a gentle rocking motion; and so light was the burden within that they carried the chair as though unconscious of its weight. Its place in the procession seemed only that of stage paraphernalia, of which there was little enough in those days.

The sudden jolt, as the men came to a halt at the Palace, aroused Philip to life's exciting realities. He looked out of the window in time to see Shakspere embraced by a young nobleman of great beauty and elegance. Philip felt a pang of envy as he recognized in him Henry Wriothsley, the Earl of Southampton, who was the most petted and admired youth of his time and Shakspere's devoted friend as well.

A moment later, Shakspere bade adieu to his admirer, and hastened to see how it fared with his boy in the sedan chair.

"Art more thyself, my Philip?" he asked.

"Yes, the drink has made me as strong as a lion, and the sleep was even better—it has given back my wits."

"Thank God for that! My friend the Earl of Southampton is like to lose his wits. I wonder if I could win them back to him so easily!"

"What ails him? So fair and rich and noble! Gifted, too, is he not?"

"Yes, yes, you speak as though you knew him! He is all that you say, and more. But he was never made for the Court; his nature is too frank and open, his temper too quick; his impulses are too generous, and his heart is too affectionate. All the qualities that make him adorable, at the same time, combine to undo him. It is said the Queen mothers him with a patience to make the world marvel; but even so, he leaves her presence often enough in disgrace."

"They are having a hard time to marry him. Two years ago, they picked out a wife, cousin to Lord Burleigh, but his Grace of Southampton refused to consent to the banns. Last year, he gave unwilling assent when Lady Betty Manners was proposed, but lo! my Lady would have none of him! 'In sooth, he is too light a weight for me,' says she, but she knows well that my Lord prefers a brunette. He will love you, Philip."

"Now heaven forbid!" exclaimed Philip. "I should not wish to be your rival, and as Juliet I shall not be a brunette. More's the pity! for my sister might have given me her braids."

Lord Hunsdon's protégés were provided with a large room near the grand chamber in which the play was to be performed, but my Lord had not thought it necessary to tell them at what hour they would be called upon. The jousts in the tilt yard were under

way with every likelihood of lasting through the afternoon; and the prospect would have been dull enough for the players, had not word come from the Earl of Southampton that one of his tents was at their disposal, with sufficient space for them all to watch the magnificent spectacle.

The tournament in the sixteenth century had lost the excitement of the tourneys of medieval times. It had developed into a more formal and less warlike exhibition, and offered a peculiarly fortunate occasion for displaying the splendor in which the Court delighted. Instead of the heavy iron mail of previous years, there was worn light body armor of glittering gold and silver richly damascened, or of steel chain as fine as serpent's scales. Horses, richly caparisoned, seemed not less proud than their knightly riders. Around the lists were bright silk tents in all manner of oriental colors. In

front of the different tents hung the arms and banners of the contestants.

The Court occupied a canopied pavilion at the head of the tilt yard, with the Queen's throne in the centre. She was the jewel for which the rest of the exhibition was but the chosen setting.

The actors had just taken their places, when Shakspere was called aside to speak with Lady Southampton. She sat under the silken canopies at some distance to the left of the Queen, who had no special fondness for her. Still a young woman, she retained decided traces of beauty, though the refinement of form and feature that characterized her son were now lacking in her.

She held out her hand very graciously at Master Will's approach. He kissed it, and she murmured hastily:

"I have a little commission for you, Master Shakspere—a sonnet on the advantages of early marriage. Some-

thing in your choicest vein! You guess my meaning—you know my son!"

"I am my Lord's devoted slave; and he, his mother's mirror! In his face, you behold the lovely April of your youth. Your meaning is that in his prime he, too, should have such a glass to look upon.

"Ah, yes! That is better than I can say it. Go tell the Earl in a gentle sonnet, Master Shakspere, a sonnet that he will show in his pride to the young lords that know him best! And so even the ladies shall hear of it."

"Should I refer to Betty Manners —I mean to better manners, Madame? More consideration from my Lord to a certain Lady?"

"Better manners will do well for your own study, Sir Impudence, as well as for my son!" responded the Countess, her gorgeous shoulders shaking with laughter.

"But I pardon the slip. Leave that Lady out of your sonnet. No woman shall have the chance to refuse his Lordship twice."

"Go now, you have upset my sedateness already. Lord, sir! I would we had a few tongues like yours at Court. But no! Life would be too vivacious. Your visits are frequent enough, in all conscience."

"Yes, Madame, but always desired. For they depend upon the demand for them, and cease when that ceases."

"In so much, you have the best of us," she admitted. "Many of us remain, perforce, unwilling guests of an uncertain hostess."

The last was whispered behind her fan.

"You have my commission," she continued, dismissing him with a nod and a smile.

The young actor bowed and withdrew. His bearing was graceful, but

proud, with a consciousness of power that was not unpleasing.

"Were it not for that mountebank's cloak and feather, one might take him for a Prince!" exclaimed a lady at the side of the Countess.

"Proud he is, and proud he may well be! A young Lucifer," asserted Lady Southampton with some asperity. "Pray, were you not at Court when he called himself 'Cousin' to our Queen?"

"What jest is this?" queried Mistress Vernon, quite scandalized.

"Well, it was a jest, but so cleverly put! I laugh now to think of it.

"Her Majesty was sitting in front of the stage, and Master Will Shakspere was taking the part of the King about to lead the army to battle. Oh, he was so grand! One's hair fairly rose on end! We were all wrought up to a frenzy of excitement, when her Majesty—we know her love of fun—

leaned forward and dropped a glove at his feet.

"Such an interruption! you will say, for he must needs stop playing the King to play the page, and kneel to return the token with stammering and confusion! Oh, no, not at all! My young Master proceeds as King:

" 'But though bent upon this high embassy,
First stoop we to pick up our Cousin's glove!'

" 'Our Cousin's glove,' mind you! With that, he hands it to her bowing, and goes on with his lines."

"God ha' mercy! And what said the Queen?"

"She smiled at him and whispered, 'Faith, Coz, I would my tongue were as quick as thine.' "

The Countess of Southampton paused, well satisfied with the impres-

sion made. She had chosen this as an opportunity to force Mistress Vernon to believe something that she was anxious to have her believe, which was that the mother of the Earl of Southampton selected his friends. One whom she would never select or approve was this same beautiful woman sitting next to her, whose dark eyes were continually seeking, hungrily seeking, the young Earl as he rode, the fairest knight in that gay cavalcade.

Lady Southampton watched her from time to time as a cat watches a mouse.

"Ah, no!" she exclaimed to herself, with inward satisfaction. "You will not have a chance at him here, beside his mother. I am near you, young mistress, not because I love you—far from it!"

CHAPTER V

In which Philip objects

SHAKSPERE returned to find his companions engaged in a heated discussion with one of the retainers of the Earl of Bedford That young Lord, in imitation of his friend, Southampton, or perhaps

"Great princes' favorites their fair leaves spread
But as the marigold at the sun's eye."

Sonnet XXV.

inspired by his gifted wife, had decided to become a patron of the arts. But failing to put much wit into the matter, perhaps having little to spare, he had picked out an unlikely protégé in the person of Philip, whose only desire at this time was to be let alone.

Burbage was talking, while Philip, who had backed into a corner of the tent, seemed about to edge his way through the silken wall behind him. Shakspere stood an amused listener.

"To the gracious Earl, many thanks! His favor shall be accepted later on, but our friend here, our lad of the pretty face, has no disposition for gayety. He is already over-awed at the prospect of appearing before her Majesty. So with our humblest——"

"I was to speak to the lad!" interrupted the attendant, surlily. "As yet I have had no word with him!"

"Nor can have," said Shakspere. "Our comrade is ill. We fear he may

be unable to perform his duty to her Majesty, and I have been ordered by Lord Hunsdon to keep a strict watch upon him."

"A warm couch in my Lordship's apartments would give him more comfort than he will find with Hunsdon's men. But perhaps you players have not been told that the performance is delayed until to-morrow?"

"We have not been so informed," admitted Shakspere, "but I supposed as much. What say you, Philip? There is honor for you in this most kind invitation, and better cheer than you will find with us."

Thus addressed, Philip stepped forward with an air of desperation.

"Pray say to his Lordship, the Earl of Bedford, that I am little used to gentle company, having only lately left the Cathedral Choir to join the players. I watched my Lord in the lists to-day with great admiration, but

such splendor affrights me. I should not dare to approach the moon, nor one of the stars—nor his Lordship.

"Say further that if my performance on the morrow merit a word of commendation from my Lord, I shall count it a great honor to be allowed—" here the boy blushed, and stammered with a modesty that became him well—"to kiss his hand!"

The man withdrew, grinning and flattered, and the group of actors surveyed Philip with some show of pride.

"By my soul, you have a ready tongue!" commented Burbage, approvingly. "But why not follow the example Will sets and win some good of these gay folk? The fellow spoke truly, you would have been well entertained."

"Too well!" interrupted Shakspere. "He would have been called upon to spend half the night amusing his Lordship; and we should have found him fit

for nothing but his bed on the morrow."

"Ah, too true! You speak from bitter experience," said Richard Burbage, tauntingly.

Shakspere joined in the laugh that followed.

"I speak not of my patron," he retorted, "but of his imitators!"

The bugles now sounded the close of the tournament, and the Court adjourned from the tilt yard to prepare for the banqueting hall. Queen Elizabeth's maids were divided as to who had carried off the honors of the day, and the merits of the different contestants were long discussed. I think we may accept the judgments of Mistress Vernon and of Master Shakspere in favor of Southampton. They might have been biased by their affections, but the poet, George Peele, who described the tournament in blank verse, gives the same verdict in favor of the

Earl, "so valiant in arms—gentle and debonair."

The actors continued their discussion as they followed the gay multitude back to the Palace.

"I," said Philip, "have not the slightest notion of staying in this palace over night. The play should have come off at three o'clock. It is now sundown, and where is any sign that we are needed here? My good sister will think me dead, an I fail to come home. So I must go, sirs, and will return to-morrow in better spirits than to-day."

"Indeed!" spoke up Richard Burbage. "Methinks I see you skipping gaily home to be caught like a little mouse in some trap prepared by our friends of The Curtain! And as for being in better spirits, that is assured. There is no stinting the liquor for Lord Hunsdon's men. We are due to have a fine feast to-night, eh, Master Will?"

"What odds to him?" interrupted Sly. "He goes to his lover, Lord Southampton. We shall see nothing more of him."

"And I am invited to pass my time with some ladies, so a happy evening is assured to me," confided Burbage.

Philip spoke again in a sharp, constrained tone: "I have said, good friends, I spend the night at home." He looked around with an air of confidence that faded away under the amused, contemptuous glances of his fellows.

"The child has said," mimicked Sly, "'he spends the night at home!'" A spot of color glowed in each pale cheek as the boy opened his mouth to speak, but a shout of laughter drowned his words.

"Enough of folly!" cried Will Shakspere, angrily. "The boy's fever is coming on again. Leave him to me! I will guard him safely through the

night. Pray, how could he sleep in such a company? There's not a man of you but wakes the midnight with his snores!"

"Fever does grow worse at night," admitted Burbage, "but I promised fair Phyllis to keep him in sight. If you carry him off, who will absolve me?"

"I will!" put in Philip eagerly, holding out his hand to Will, who tucked it under his arm. Then the two whisked out of sight before their comrades could say them nay.

CHAPTER VI

In which Shakspere plays Mentor

THROUGH long corridors, up several flights of stairs and down other flights, Shakspere led his companion, finally entering a suite of apartments beautiful beyond his little friend's imaginings. As

"Gentle thou art, and therefore to be won;
Beauteous thou art, therefore to assailed."
Sonnet XLI.

one at home and long familiar with such luxurious surroundings, he selected a low couch and bade the boy rest there. Disappearing then for a few minutes, he returned mysteriously with a bowl of excellent gruel, which he confessed to having stolen from a maid on the way to her mistress.

"Now, Philip, when you have drunk this, it will be time for your confessions!" he said, dropping his gay, careless manner and looking full at his companion. The brown eyes quailed before the searching glance of the blue ones. Tenderly, anxiously, the older man regarded the younger.

"Philip, you are not the lad I knew a month ago. No fever of a few hours has so changed you. Look, child! I see a troubled mind behind those eyes!"

"No, no!" Philip protested; but his face flushed guiltily enough.

"Confess, you have done something

of which you are ashamed! You are distressed!"

Philip shook his head, but the other continued:

"I read you like an open page. Seek not to deceive me! You have cast my counsels to the winds. Some woman is concerned in this matter, some one twice your years, of course, and envious of your beauty and your youth. Now, love, I know the very lady! I knew when she sent for you after last week's rehearsal at The Rose."

Philip, who was shaking convulsively, now sat up, rosy, merry, and laughing peals of silver laughter that rippled and echoed afar.

"Hush, rascal!" exclaimed Shakspere, holding up a warning finger. "Remember where you are! What would passers-by in the corridor think? And the Earl is not even holding an innocent carousal! It is easy for you to

laugh, but I feel little like it. Tell me, are you betrothed?"

"Well, I hardly know," answered Philip dubiously, with lurking mischief in his eyes.

"To whom?" exclaimed his inquisitor shortly.

Philip began to show signs of confusion.

"I cannot very well explain, but——"

"Come, come, sir! I grow impatient."

Perhaps Philip feared that the truth would be shaken out of him, for he answered seriously:

"To one older than I, as you have said; a Puritan, not beautiful, and violently opposed to the players."

"Now God forbid! That is far worse than I thought! You must be jesting; you would not dare to tell me this, after such pains as I have taken with you! Why, boy, you are not

twenty yet! I have planned that we should work together for years, and that I should draw real inspiration from you! Oh, what a time youth is! With the long future before us, we lay up enough of misery to last us the rest of our lives."

Philip was by this time somewhat disconcerted, and welcomed with relief the sound of an opening door.

The Earl of Southampton entered at the farthest end of the room. He was attired elaborately and yet with faultless taste. His doublet was of pale blue velvet, his knee breeches were of white satin, and his leather chest-piece was richly embroidered in silver. Further decorations consisted of a broad lace collar, an embroidered sword-belt, and garters trimmed with gold thread and silk bows. But nothing in his raiment was so astonishing as the thick red gold curls that hung in symmetrical profusion about his shoul-

ders. His face was intelligent and affable, lovable in fact.

At sight of him, Shakspere sprang up joyfully.

"Two loves have I, of comfort and despair!" he exclaimed. "Come, you, my good angel, help me to decide whether this other be good or bad. You have seen him before, and as one unprejudiced by affection shall judge him."

"Why is not this the Lady Juliet, though not now in her right attire? Who speaks of bad angels in such fair company?"

"I know not who would be so bold save Master Shakspere," said Philip, looking in unconcealed admiration at the Earl, who in turn surveyed him from head to foot, with an amused smile.

"Master Condell is here at some risk of offending my Lord of Bedford.

My Lord sought him as a guest for the night," Shakspere informed the Earl.

"Ah, Shakspere, reader of men, your words must have slipped out, all unconsciously. You do not need to play upon me or to flatter my vanity. Your friends are mine, and as your friends I welcome them. I refuse to take any satisfaction in piquing Bedford." Here he laughed with a heartiness that belied his words.

Philip's eyes had been fixed upon Southampton's hair, and now with a curiosity he could no longer restrain, he reached forward and touched one of the smooth, glossy curls that lay like a roll of burnished copper.

"Oh, forgive me, my Lord," he exclaimed, "but are they really yours?"

"Are these your Court manners?" asked the Earl, good-naturedly. "Beware of asking a like question at sight of the Queen's periwig."

"But of this gold we may speak

freely," said Shakspere. "The metal rings true! That is, if I wring a lock, my Lord will cry out. Yet this is not a topic that befits conversation, being better left to the field of verse. However, my Lord, I know that Philip is glad of anything that keeps me from the real subject at hand. I wish him to talk of himself."

Again Southampton's eyes twinkled. "O ho! And what has that wayward elf been doing?"

"Enough!" answered Shakspere disconsolately. "He is an example to you, and you shall be one to him."

"He is just beginning to be a credit to me. Oh, the pains I have taken with the rascal! Did he not enter our company straight from the Cathedral Choir without the slightest knowledge of our art, beyond what can be gained in ranting the part of Noah's Wyfie in the Miracle Plays? And now, after all my laboring for him and belaboring of

him, just as he is beginning to show real talent, I learn that he has yoked himself to a Puritan spinster twice his age!

"Heard you ever such madness, my Lord of Southampton? No! for it is only equaled by your own! You, who are a stately tree and in whom rests the future of your race, refuse to see the duty you owe to yourself and to the mother who bore you."

"Shake us together, and we shall prove a perfect pair, Will," laughed the Earl.

"No, that is not what I purpose. I have a commission to put your failings into rhyme."

"Spare me, dear poet! Riding has made my eyes heavy with sleep. I envy you, who can to bed when you choose, while I must tread a measure in the dance. I shall return ready to die of fatigue; and faith! I have no wish to find you wide-eyed and lost in

verse. Prepare me no discourses, an you love me!"

"Come, let us eat! A little supper is laid in the adjoining chamber, and I must snatch at something, for I sup with the Queen in a half hour's time, and I never willingly go hungry to a dinner of state."

"My Lord keeps his tongue to serve his brains and not his stomach," commented Shakspere, approvingly. "A dinner with her Majesty is a good time to listen and to talk. The man who forgets himself and stops to eat wastes a good opportunity."

"Will does me more than justice, as usual," said the Earl to Philip. "The real truth is that the waits are interminably long, and I become ravenous. Sometimes, the Queen keeps us an hour by deciding to change her dress again at the last moment. I have no wish to die of starvation before

'the future of my line' is provided for, so I go fortified."

He led them into the anteroom where a small table was invitingly spread. What a merry repast followed! Philip, as an invalid, received only the choicest morsels. He was allowed to eat but the breast and liver of his bird, though its fat little drumsticks were a temptation hard to resist. Devonshire cream and rennet custards were forced upon him, but the pasties and tarts were kept well out of his reach.

Shakspere was delighted to find that his little favorite was not uncongenial to his young patron. Indeed, Philip lent a strange charm to the occasion, which both of the others realized but could not define. It was a pleasure to watch the play of his features, where emotions sought to express rather than to conceal their existence. His graceful movements had a fascination all

their own. His enjoyment was evident, as was also an occasional timidity or embarrassment that bordered on fear.

From time to time, he raised his eyes with an expression of wonder at being where he was.

"I refused to visit the moon or one of the stars at Lord Bedford's request," he said, "and you, Will Shakspere, have brought me straight to the sun, and I am not burned—though a little bit afraid."

CHAPTER VII

In which a woman is discovered

LORD SOUTHAMPTON left hurriedly in reply to his valet's announcement that the procession was forming for the dining hall. Shakspere and Philip had places provided for them with Lord

"What is your substances? Whereof are you made,
That millions of strange shadows on you tend?
Sonnet LIII.

Hunsdon's retinue, but they were glad to forego a long, tiresome, formal meal where they would be among the least. For gifted as were the Lord Chamberlain's Players—talented, handsome men all of them—they were of a calling deemed so low that, even in its successful practice, there was little cause for pride; but they were serving as the mirror of their times, and not for long could Lords and Ladies despise their own likenesses.

"Philip," said Shakspere, when they were alone, "do you wish to go over your part again?"

Philip looked up in dismay.

"Are you not satisfied with me?" he exclaimed. "Must I do better than I did? Was there any fault in the lines?"

"No, no! But can you do as well tomorrow?"

"Why not, if I go home and sleep

well and am stronger to-morrow than to-day?"

"Go home! Why speak of that? You are invited here for the night."

"Now this is a mistake!" cried Philip, springing up, angrily.

"I came here freely, and will as freely return to-morrow; but stay here I shall not!"

"Came here freely? Why, you were carried here locked in a chair!"

"Burbage promised my sister!" cried Philip, desperately.

"What did he promise her? To take good care of you, but surely not to let you run the streets by night! Such a mad boy as you are! Have you never slept a night away from home?"

"No," answered Philip, "and I will not now." So saying he made a dash for the door, and was in the corridor before Shakspere realized what he was about.

Ah, but Whitehall was a labyrinth!

Shakspere paused to listen to the direction of the fleeing steps, then he tripped noiselessly and deliberately after, first in the direction of the dining hall. But Philip would not follow such a lead long; no, he would fear to encounter some guest returning from the feast. Shakspere came to a dimly lighted hallway. There were stairs just beyond. At the foot lay something, someone, all in a heap! Philip well punished!—He had missed his footing!

Shakspere stooped and lifted him in his arms.

"Naughty boy," he said, "what use in trying to run away? We are all shut up in the same trap for a few days, courtiers, servants, slaves and mice. Have a good time in the trap. It's not a bad place so long as no one is trying to kill you."

For all answer, the slender creature in his arms began to sob bitterly. The

face that rested on his shoulder and touched his cheek as he mounted the steps, was soft as a damask rose; and from the dark tresses came the perfume that is only of violets or of a woman's hair.

Shakspere knew that he carried a woman in his arms. It was the Philip he was seeking, but it was not the Philip of a month ago. For a moment, he was mystified, then the simple explanation flashed through his mind: Philip was dangerously ill. Rather than allow him to be disturbed and excited by the players, Phyllis, his twin sister, had taken his place, expecting to accomplish his appointed task in the course of the day. Now, confused and bewildered at the turn of affairs, she was utterly at a loss and lay weeping, helpless and hopeless.

A wave of pity and tenderness swept over the man, but this was speedily followed by wonder and ad-

miration at the intelligence with which she had played not only her brother's part, but the part of her brother. Shakspere's mind embraced all the possible outcomes of the situation with the quickness that was characteristic of him. If he should help her to leave the Palace, her whole escapade would be discovered. If he should insist on her carrying out her intention, and force her to remain Philip to the end, perhaps no one would be the wiser; and his play! After all, what was of more importance than his play? She must, on no account, be allowed to escape. He was sorry for her, but she must accomplish her undertaking. She was now one of the players, a puppet on which much depended.

As he looked down at her, the closed eyelids quivered, then opened wide.

"Don't you understand?" she said, tremulously. "I cannot stay here."

He veiled the kindness that might

unnerve her. A word of sympathy never stops a woman's tears; it opens the floodgates.

"I understand that any wilfulness on your part would disgrace us all!" he said. His mind was made up: he had decided not to acknowledge his discovery.

But Phyllis had caught that first glance of surprise, and she knew that he had guessed her secret.

Once more they entered Southampton's apartments. Phyllis slipped to her feet, but Shakspere kept one of her hands firmly grasped in his, as though fearing she would again try to escape.

"Now, Philip," he said, drawing her to a door at the right of the one by which they had entered, "here is the wardrobe where my Lord's garments hang: this little room has but one door, which, I promise you, shall not be disturbed. Get you in here and sleep.

See! I shall make a good bed for you," and he brought robes and cushions from one of the couches.

"Now rest in peace," he said. "No one shall enter. You are as safe as in your chamber at home, and I am your guard."

"Wait! wait a moment!" cried Phyllis, faintly. "I ought not to have come."

"You did well to come," said Shakspere, decidedly, "if you act well to-morrow. You are a part of Art now, Philip; we marveled at you to-day, and yet my brightest dream is of a time when women shall join us in our work. The day may be not far off. I believe it has dawned already in France, where ladies are more daring than here."

He spoke kindly, reassuringly. There was much comfort for Phyllis in his words.

Then, just as he would have done

to Philip, he kissed his little friend good-night; and the matter-of-fact manner of his kiss made her wonder whether he really knew her, after all.

CHAPTER

VIII

In which friends discuss private affairs

SHAKSPERE stepped from the wardrobe and carefully closed the door. Then he pulled a couch in front of it, and seating himself comfortably, prepared in

"Love is too young to know what conscience is——"

Sonnet CLI.

a businesslike way to carry out his commission from the Countess of Southampton.

But his thoughts of his "dear Lord," "his patron," "his lover," did not flow with their wonted freedom. They were interrupted by visions of the dark lady who lay sleeping so near. The red-gold curls that had been the sun of his poetry were dimmed in the shadow of soft black tresses. The mystery concerning Philip had taken hold of his mind, the Philip of his last kiss, more beautiful than the sons of men.

"What is your substance, whereof are you made," he mused, "that millions of vague shadows on you tend?"

Strange words to address to a well-known friend! He was writing to the Earl, but he was thinking of Phyllis.

"Come, come!" he exclaimed, with an indignant shake of his head, "this is no love sonnet! It has nought to do with shadows! I must berate the Earl

for his failure to make a suitable marriage. I must find subtile and convincing arguments, and they must be pleasing as well. And if it be Phyllis who is sleeping yonder, she is Philip's sister and nothing to me!"

Concentrating his mind on the matter that had been, for many months, an important topic on all tongues at Court, he wrote the first lines of the sonnet that the Earl's mother had commanded,

"From fairest creatures, we desire increase
That thereby beauty's rose may never die."

The lines pleased him. They were flattering and instructive. The rest of the sonnet was ready in his mind and would have been speedily transcribed to the page, but the very slightest of raps on the door caught his ear. He

raised his head and listened for a moment. The sound was repeated more courageously. He hastened to the door, and opened it.

Elizabeth Vernon in full court dress entered. Without the slightest effort to hide her eagerness and anxiety, she glanced about the room. She hardly seemed to notice Shakspere. Her eyes scanned each corner and finally rested on the closet door. There was a desperate look on her beautiful face.

For Shakspere, the situation was most embarrassing. For his own sake, for Southampton's sake—for the sake of the little player, the lady must be got away and quietly. And so it was for her own sake that he made a plea.

"My Lady—I entreat you tell me how I may be of service to you!" There was no answer.

"Lady Betty— Do consider that

you imperil your reputation by remaining here with me!"

"My reputation!" she burst out bitterly—"I have none! I lost it here weeks ago! Where else shall I go to seek it?"

There was a moment's pause.

"The Earl is not here," said Shakspere.

"No, but who is here?" exclaimed the lady in a frenzy of jealousy. "Who is here? I heard a woman's voice as I passed on my way to the banquet. I did not need to feign illness—I was so much affected that her Majesty took pity on my condition and excused me from further attendance."

"Mistress Vernon, I am happy to be able to relieve your mind entirely! You have mistaken a player for a possible rival! Young Condell is here; it was his voice that you heard."

"I do not believe you, Shakspere! I

heard the voice of a woman—of a young girl!"

"Oh, you do his Lordship cruel injustice!" exclaimed Shakspere, indignantly.

"You are all against me!" cried the lady. "You are against me, with the rest. All against me because I trust him—because I love him! Jealous? Who is jealous? I? No! The Queen is jealous! His mother is jealous! You are jealous! I do not need to be jealous while I have his love—but can I hold it in the face of all the plotting and planning that is going on to deprive me of it? I am not allowed to have a word with him! Not even a chance to defend myself against the lies they pour into his ears! God knows no other man has ever found me kind!"

"I know nothing of these matters," protested the poet. "I can only pray you to withdraw."

"Not until you promise not to join the league against me!" She turned to him with animation and hope. "Promise me not to help them! They are planning to turn his interest elsewhere! Even Essex, my cousin, will do nothing for me, fearing to lose what influence he has. What chance have I against them all—one woman—rich in his love—without it, oh, how poor!" Her eyes filled with tears.

"Be assured that I, who love your lover, will never join a conspiracy against his happiness—which is you!" He opened the door, but the lady caught his hand and held it while she exclaimed:

"If you have the feelings of a man as well as the mind of a poet, I pray you never to forget that kind promise—and know that you have one friend who will never prove ungrateful for your kindness in this time of grief —for, oh, I am in deep distress—they

talk of sending the Earl to Spain—with Essex."

"What little power I have shall be used to keep my Lord at home."

"God grant it!" The lady withdrew reluctantly, and the poet, giving a sigh of relief, returned to his interrupted sonnet. But ever and anon his eyes roved to the closet door, and once he muttered aloud: "Thank heaven!"

The verses were ready for the Earl some time before his return. Shakspere was anxious to prevent any reference to the companion left with him, for he knew that, under such peculiar circumstances, it would be impossible for the Earl to consider the situation with due seriousness. And so well acquainted was the young Lord with all the charms of the opposite sex that Shakspere knew that disguise would not long be successful.

Perhaps even now his Lordship had penetrated the secret! But the night

was wearing on, and the morrow could not come too soon.

The Earl entered shortly after midnight. He was in a royal good humor; his eyes were dancing, his cheeks flushed; but his words belied his looks.

"Dear Will," he exclaimed, "how the hours have dragged!"

"Not where you have been," retorted Shakspere. "Nor have they dragged here; for you have been in my heart, its own dear company."

"You give me good proof, indeed!" said the Earl, putting out his hand for the lines Shakspere held toward him.

"But no! Read them to me yourself, my friend, that I may know whether or not you mean every word."

"That will be hard to tell," mused Shakspere.

"I write them at your mother's request; I mean them for you; but selfishly, dreading to lose you, I hope

against this good advice for my own sake."

"But is it not agreed between us that your muse shall not be forced? Why write to me 'at request'?"

"My muse never needs forcing! Rather I hold her in check. Were she given free rein, she would run you to death, and you would be weary of her and of me."

"Who knows better than you the value of your verse? You fear that my attempts to pay you will bankrupt me! You believe in your 'immortal rhyme,' but you resent making it in any way common."

"Common—I, a jester for the crowd? How can I be else than common? Yet, beloved friend, you know that there are depths in my heart, which are not for the multitude to find. Hid safe within lies my best self—yourself, my Lord, who have freed me from the bondage of poverty, and

given my soul breadth and space enough for song."

"What a delight it has been to me!" responded Southampton.

"Tell me, will your father have much difficulty in recovering Asbies?"

They were referring to the beautiful old home of Shakspere's mother, which had been mortgaged and estranged from the family for many years. It was about to become the property of the creditors, when Shakspere came to his father's relief with a round sum near two thousand pounds—a wonderful amount of money for an actor in those days. The gift had been pressed upon him after his dedication of Venus and Adonis to the Earl of Southampton. The exuberant gratitude of Fortune's young favorite was not to be denied; and, indeed, the Earl made an ideal patron and donor.

"There will be no difficulty, because we have now sufficient means to avoid

difficulty. The title is not clear, but silver pounds will straighten it out," Shakspere replied.

"But, my Lord, we are straying from the point. My sonnet here is inspired by your failings, not by your virtues. See—here is no truckling!"

He read the sonnet to Southampton, who listened with rapt attention. He enjoyed the lines keenly. He was flattered, and at the same time touched, by the delicate argument. When the reading ceased, he turned his eyes upon his friend with a delicious, dreamy gaze.

"A duty, yes! A pleasure for those who could take it lightly. But I, with a heart so tender that it abides not woman's tears, to me the bondage seems alarming. To give up all women for one! Now I have my choice. The whole field lies open, and I sip the sweets where I will. But who would think of shutting up a roving

honey-bee with one clover blossom for the rest of his days?"

"The husbands of our time are allowed much liberty," remarked Shakspere.

Southampton gave him a mischievous glance.

"There are few wives like Mistress Anne," he said. "Most often, the wives who allow their husbands liberty claim it themselves; and that I would never endure." He thought for a few moments in silence, and then sprang up with boyish frankness.

"Truth to tell, I have already fallen in love, Will! That prevents any possible consideration of marriage."

"Pray, why?"

"Surely none could advise me to be so base as to marry one woman while every thought is of another!"

"God forbid! But why not marry 'the other'?"

"Ah, if I only could! But no, I

should never get consent. And though she is adorable, I have never even thought of marriage with her."

"Then I have no doubt that you will recover from this attack," said Shakspere, consolingly.

The Earl shook his head.

"I have no wish to recover. The madness is too delightful."

"I see I shall have some trouble in bringing you over to her Ladyship's view," said the poet. "But now let us to bed. The hour is late, and sleep cures many ills."

CHAPTER

IX

In which Phyllis awakens betimes

THE wardrobe in which Phyllis passed the night was slightly lighted by a window that looked upon an inner court. The gray dawn crept through the casement, lighting up a weird procession that

"So is the time that keeps you as my chest
Or as the wardrobe which the robe doth hide."
Sonnet LII.

stole into the girl's last dream. There, hanging in a row against the wall like a company of headless knights, were the garments of his Lordship.

The rich costumes bespoke his taste and spirit so plainly that a knowledge of them was like a key to the character of their owner. They were protected from dust by a projecting shelf on which the corresponding headgear was arranged,—helmets, Scotch bonnets, periwigs, and large hats of the Cavalier with their wonderful plumes. On the floor beneath, standing in military precision, were shoes, boots, leggings and high-heeled slippers. A fortune was represented in the quantity of gold and silver lace, buckles and ornaments, yet here was only a small part of the Earl's apparel. The closets of Hampton Court could show a bigger display, though not more elaborate; for now all was of the finest, in honor of the Queen.

Phyllis opened her eyes, wondering why the vision did not vanish; and as the events of yesterday crowded in upon her mind, she still waited for the whole fantastic fabric of her adventures to fade away, leaving her at home again in the dull routine of a quiet maiden's daily life.

But the light grew clearer, and my Lord's apparel became more distinct and splendid. Phyllis sat up with a little exclamation of horror at her situation. Then she thought of Philip. There was something infinitely consoling in the thought of Philip. Only a little more courage, and her work would be done! She would soon be at home with that dear brother. For his sake, she must succeed. Was there anything that she would not undertake and accomplish for his sake? With a brief prayer for his speedy recovery, she arose and opened her door to peep into the room beyond.

In front of her, on a couch lay Shakspere asleep. Phyllis held her breath while she looked at him, but she studied him well. His scarlet cloak was spread over him, as though even in sleep he was loth to resign all sign of his calling. His face looked older than when animated by the ever-changing play of feature that charmed one in his conscious hours; there were lines on the forehead brought by care and responsibility that had lain too heavily on youthful shoulders.

She noticed with interest that his hair and beard were cut after the manner of Chaucer's portraits.

"He imitates his Master in his looks," she said to herself, "but there is no copying of his songs, I know!"

The sleeper is always in the place of the child. Through the day, Phyllis admired and feared this man, but now there was something pathetic and wistful in his face that went to her heart.

She thought him beautiful. Knowing nothing of his past, she feared it had been sad.

Slipping quietly by Shakspere, she walked across the room toward where Lord Southampton lay lost in the recesses of an enormous canopied four-poster. Phyllis did not know that the curtained pile she approached was a bed until the Earl pushed aside the curtains and whispered a smiling good-morning.

He was rosy and flushed with sleep, his auburn curls somewhat disheveled, and the more beautiful for their disarray.

He held out his hand to Phyllis, who kissed it dutifully, blushing and somewhat confused. The Earl was pitiful of such timidity, caused as he supposed by awe of his rank, and he desired to make the friend of his friend at ease.

"Perch yourself up here beside me, Philip. No? Why 'no'? Is there

anything fearful about me? Surely not! My poet would have found me out long ago, and he would then have warned me!"

The Earl was watching her with wide-eyed interest.

"Come, tell me about the Puritan!" he went on. "My curiosity will not be denied. Is Will really displeased with you? or is he but acting as he does in my case? For you must know that he means not a word of what he says to me. It would break his heart to see me wedded."

Phyllis seated herself on the edge of the bed, and Southampton, propped on one elbow, waited to be amused.

"What is there amiss in a suitable betrothal?" asked the little player.

"A suitable betrothal!" repeated the Earl. "How excellent! And when did you fall in love with the lady?"

"Fall in love? I know nothing of

that. My guardian declares that he has arranged a suitable and desirable match. I shall begin to love when the marriage takes place."

"Nonsense! Your eyes are full of mischief. I warrant you, you know some pretty girls of your own age who would suit you better! Why, they would have married me years ago! But I have waited, and now I am in love. Do you know the most beautiful woman at Court? She has dark eyes like yours! The Court admits no beauty in a dark lady, but in our hearts we know what beauty is."

"Yes, it lies deeper than speech," assented Phyllis. "How glad you must be that you have at last found the right wife!"

"Alas! she may never be my wife. The Queen is very watchful of her maids. No one of them can marry without her consent. And I,—I am a

child of State. Do you know what that means? Her Majesty stands in place of father and guardian. She would never allow the marriage."

Phyllis, deeply moved, reached out her hand in sympathy; but the woe that such a black prospect should have caused a would-be husband, was not evinced by his Lordship. He took the little hand quickly enough, and surveyed it with critical interest. When she would have withdrawn it, he held it firmly, and looked into her face with assumed indignation.

"How dare you, one of the players, show me a hand more slender than my own, which is called like that of a woman? Confess! Are you not the veritable Lady Juliet? Eyes and hair like night, the very ideal of the part you play!"

Too much confused to answer, Phyllis continued her efforts to get her hand

away; but though the Earl's was as fair as her own, it was strong as an iron vise.

"A beautiful hand for a boy!" pursued Southampton teasingly, "but how very weak!"

"No, my Lord," exclaimed Phyllis, "it is not beautiful nor weak, but yours is over-strong! One who is victor in the tournament ought to be more powerful than a lad who plays woman's parts."

At this moment, the two were conscious of other eyes. Shakspere had awakened. The sight that greeted him was not one to begin his day auspiciously. There was the timid girl whom he had been at such pains to conceal, sitting familiarly beside the very man from whom he most wished to hide her. He glanced in wondering indignation at Southampton. The Earl was looking at the little player,

without the slightest effort to conceal his admiration.

Shakspere's love for Southampton was of long standing. It was founded on the strongest possible foundation, that of benefits received and, continued. His anger turned entirely against Phyllis, because it seemed as though she must have deliberately brought about this situation: either she had told all, or his Lordship had known all, without the need of being told. In any case, she ought to have stayed where she was put!

He was always master of himself; so that now he sprang up with apparent haste, exclaiming on the lateness of the hour. "We must be off at once, my Lord," he said, approaching Southampton. That affectionate young man, utterly unconscious of any cause for ill-feeling, pulled Shakspere down for a boisterous embrace; seeing which, Phyllis saved herself from fur-

ther good-byes by hastening to the door.

Shakspere followed in grave displeasure; and silently, they made their way through the Palace halls.

CHAPTER X

In which actions and acting are discussed

WHEN they reached the theatre, the troupe of actors had not yet bestirred themselves, and the great hall was deserted.

"Sit you here," said

"How like Eve's apple doth thy beauty grow,
If thy sweet virtue answer not thy show!"
Sonnet XCIII.

Shakspere, sternly, placing a chair near the royal boxes on the stage. "Sit here, and do you not leave the stage on any account. Remember that I am answerable for you."

The spirit of mischief entered Phyllis at sight of the dignified, earnest countenance of her hitherto sympathetic friend.

"You have said I must act well today," she answered, demurely. "Tell me, how can I act the boy well, sitting still on a chair?"

Even this clever turn, the poet was not at a loss for a reply. Going frankly to her, he exclaimed:

"Phyllis, you are too quick for me. Let us play no parts to each other. Of course, I know you! And my anxiety for you is greater than your own, because I know so well what would result from discovery of you.

"There is not a man in the Palace or in London Town who would believe

in you, if he knew that you had come, of your free will, into the company of the players——"

"There is one man," she exclaimed with flaming cheeks and angry eyes, "and for him I care more than for all others in London, or in the world!"

"There is one man," assented Shakspere, eagerly, "who blesses you for coming—the man whose art could never have been realized without you."

"I speak of Philip, my brother."

"And I speak of myself."

"Of yourself? No, no! You are already suspicious and doubtful. You are one of the players. Good women exist for you only in your plays!"

"You have heard me say as much; but hold it not against me, for I am truly anxious to protect you. You are inexperienced, young, emotional. Who in his senses would permit you to come under the influence of his Lordship, the Earl of Southampton?"

"Do you speak ill of him—your friend?"

"I speak no ill of him—friend, patron, my personal sovereign, if you will. I speak no ill of him, but I declare him irresistible. And he has talked of love to you already!"

"My fault has been in selecting you for a confidant!" exclaimed Phyllis, suddenly. "I should have confessed all to Burbage in the first place!"

"Oh, heavens, no! How have I failed you? What could he have done more? Is there anything you would ask of me?"

"Yes! You have made me afraid—afraid of you and of your comrades. I ask you to busy yourself elsewhere and to leave me alone."

He looked at her, reproachfully.

"You show great discretion! I am a man like the rest; but my dismissal comes because I try to put you on your guard—because I want to see that no

harm befalls you—because I desire that no one shall know what I know!"

"You pretend to understand better than I how to act my part, which is not a little difficult! I need kindness and help, and you berate me! If I had held back like a shy girl when my Lord called me, he would have known me for one. As it is, I am still Philip to him, unless your strangeness and haste have betrayed the secret."

"But, Phyllis," argued the man, only half convinced, "he was talking of your hair and hands and eyes!"

"Yes, they are uncommon for a boy!" She opened the brown eyes wide upon him.

Blue is the color of truth, and one cannot find truth in a dark eye. Shakspere gazed until his glance was drowned in the limpid depths, but he turned away, only half satisfied. He felt that she was deliberately trying to win back his approval, and he felt him-

self yield, though unwillingly, to her charm. Seeing him relent, she caught his hand and cried:

"Let me be your Philip again! I liked it better so. Forget who I really am!"

With an effort, he recovered his usual sprightliness, and bade her help him with the curtain, which was not running smoothly.

The Palace began to wake up, and the theatre was soon a busy place. Tibalt and Mercutio tried a bout with the rapiers to give them an appetite for breakfast, and various other characters in the play went over their parts.

Phyllis climbed into the balcony to assure herself that it was in order, and from this point of vantage she saw the Earl of Southampton enter the door, accompanied by two others whom she did not know—John Florio, anxious to know how fared the boy for

whom his elixir had been prescribed; and Essex, the Court favorite. They sought out Shakspere and invited him to breakfast with them; but he pleaded much business as an excuse, and they were forced to go without him. As they withdrew, Essex whispered some phrases apparently of a flattering nature, for Shakspere's gesture indicated a modest disclaimer, when he bade them good-bye with the air of a courtly host; this was, in truth, his domain.

When they were gone, he looked up at Phyllis, who was resting her arms on the balcony. Southampton had not even glanced at her. With a feeling of relief, so intense that he did not try to explain it, Shakspere decided that the girl's secret was still hers and his own.

At midday, after a late breakfast, the Queen and her attendants entered the hall that Lord Hunsdon had fitted up for the royal theatre.

Masques and plays were frequently given here, but usually without any great formality. Her Majesty's moods changed so constantly that her entertainers were often forced to plan at short notice. To-day it was not so, and more than ordinary efforts had been made. The balcony needed no label, and there was a brave attempt at costuming. Lord Hunsdon felt that his preparations were elaborate, and he was ready to enjoy a triumph.

There was considerable excitement among the members of the cast. The only calm person was the author-manager, on whom so much responsibility rested. He seemed to be everywhere, and had good need for all his presence of mind; only his tact assured the peaceful behavior of his comrades whom idleness was beginning to make boisterous.

The Mercutio had enjoyed an extra quart of ale for his breakfast, and he

now grew wrathful at the necessity of allowing Tibalt to overcome him with the rapier. He had not realized before how mortifying it would be to let these Lords and Ladies think he could not parry such a simple thrust! Shakspere took time to restore the comedian's good humor, explaining that Mercutio's value lay in his merry disposition and clever tongue. Tibalt's triumph was to be brief at best! He was a surly fellow, and Romeo would soon lay him low.

Burbage was superb—he showed to the best advantage when pleased with the world and with himself, as he was now. In an enthusiastic frame of mind, he congratulated his Juliet on her appearance.

"I feared you might be worse today instead of better," he said, "but Greene had no real wish to kill you! Just to sicken you and put you out of the way for a day: that would have

satisfied him. But fortune has favored us, and here you are, one of Lord Hunsdon's men after all!"

"Philip," he added, suddenly, "I have always wished I could play opposite a woman once, and now——"

"Yes, what now?"

"Now I cannot imagine a woman's making so sweet a Juliet as you do!"

"Perchance, my sister?"

"Oh, no, she is too discreet. She would never allow herself to be tossed by such mighty passions as we have here."

Juliet's cheeks paled perceptibly, as she turned aside to straighten the cap of the nurse. Tom Sly took his part well, but was temporarily overcome by the difficulty of adjusting cap and apron.

CHAPTER XI

In which a woman is successful.

THERE was a sudden hush in the hall. The Queen was seated to her liking, and she signaled for the play to begin. * * *

What a wonderful performance! There were the first of the

"Oh, sure I am, the wits of former days
To subjects worse have given admiring praise!"
Sonnet LIX.

players of the time; there was the greatest of authors; and there was as august an audience as ever assembled! And all were held breathless and spell-bound by the power of a beautiful actress. Phyllis had stepped beyond the pale. For her, life could never turn back to yesterday. She was the ideal heroine of the world's romance, playing before the Queen; she was the personification of his ideal, playing before the poet.

As one fascinated, the Earl of Southampton watched her. He sat beside Lady Vernon, but his eyes never left Phyllis for a moment while she was on the stage. The Lords Bedford and Essex were hardly less interested. In the short intermission between the acts, "that beautiful boy, Philip," was the chief topic. But Philip Condell had been talked of for some weeks with admiration, and so strong was the resemblance between Phyllis and her brother

that none thought of questioning the identity.

It was evident from the first that the play would be a success. Interest never flagged, and the Queen forgot to yawn.

Relieved in regard to his personal fortunes, Shakspere had leisure to consider the fortunes of others. The attention Phyllis was attracting disturbed him. To get her safely home would be a problem. The affection he felt for Philip lying sick added to his anxiety. He had worldly wisdom enough to know that Philip might not regard this escapade as his sister did—in the light of a service for which he should be grateful. Philip was a youth of a sensitive and delicate temperament. Phyllis seemed possessed of more force and courage than he, and Shakspere felt that the brother must be spared all knowledge of what had occurred.

In consequence, now the poet was in haste for the epilogue; and then without waiting for congratulations, he hoped to take his friend's dear sister safely home. But this was not easy of accomplishment. In the applause that followed the end of the play, the chief actors filed across the stage, each stopping to bow to the Queen, who had now and then a word to give them.

"As for you, Master Shakspere," she said, in answer to his deferential salutation, "I shall not forgive you the tears we have shed over these tragic lovers until you present yourself a year hence with a comedy which shall make us forget tears in laughter. Mind you, my old friend Falstaff must be of the company!"

In this fashion came the commission of Shakspere for the Merry Wives of Windsor.

Burbage received an ovation. His handsome figure and his passionate

acting invariably kindled enthusiasm; and of Phyllis the Queen said audibly:

"He will never play the man half as well as he does the maid."

When they passed off the stage, the elder Burbage shook Shakspere's hand warmly, and congratulated him on their great success.

Meanwhile, the Earl of Bedford came behind the curtain and engaged Phyllis in conversation. He was exactly Southampton's age and his boon companion; but in physical and mental attributes, the two were very different. Southampton was manly in spite of his almost feminine beauty; while Bedford, naturally vigorous, seemed sapped of strength by the voluptuous life of the Court.

"You must not plead fear as an excuse to get away from me now!" he laughed. "I have a serious proposition to make to you."

"I shall be honored to listen, my

Lord, but pray allow me first to remove these awkward woman's trappings," Phyllis answered readily; and Shakspere admired the wit that warned her to be rid of her robes. In them, she was too alluring.

A few minutes later, her slim figure showed the graceful page for some lady's bower. This had been the thought in Bedford's mind. He was seeking an attendant for his young wife, but he now decided that the boy was too attractive for that post.

"I need a valet," he said. "It is a position of honor near my person. I offer it to you."

Shakspere clenched his fists in impotent rage, but Phyllis looked amused and answered calmly:

"My Lord, my talents lie in such a different direction! My unfitness must be my excuse for refusing the honor you offer me."

"But, boy, you are ambitious, surely!

This is a great chance to rise in the world. Do not take my words too lightly. As to unfitness, practice will overcome that. You are clever enough. Think how fine it would be for you to live in my household, clad and fed as my retainers are."

"And should I have nothing to do but dress and eat?" asked the boy, appearing to take an interest.

"Oh, a few light tasks," murmured his Lordship. "I should let you shave me, perhaps. You have nice, delicate hands. I hate paws upon my face."

"Well, my Lord, I differ from you," said Phyllis, rubbing her smooth cheeks." I never trust a light hand to shave me for fear of its dropping the razor."

Bedford could but laugh at the frolicsome youth, it was so evident that his face had never yet caused the barber a moment's time.

"Truly," the boy proceeded, "at

sight of a spider, the razor would slip from my hand. Whereas I can recite the monologue of the mad Dane without fear, even in the dark.

"Is it a dagger that I see before me? No, no—only a razor!

"My Lord, my Lord, you cannot understand! While you offer me an honor, as undeserved as it is generous, think what I should have to renounce. I may yet live to be a King—upon the stage."

Shakspere's eyes gleamed with admiration and approval. This Phyllis, she was wonderful! Philip would never have answered so well. Such effrontery, such charming impudence, was unprecedented! The Earl seemed actually dazed. Recovering himself with an effort, he renewed his insistence.

"I shall not hold your words against you, and I wish you so well that I am

going to lend you my livery for a few days."

At this, one of Bedford's attendants stepped forward, and obeying a motion from his master, endeavored to throw a green cloak over the little player's shoulders.

Phyllis dodged him, and her face flushed with anger.

"I will be frank with you, my Lord," she said. "I have no wish to go into service; but if I should do so, it would be to Lord Southampton, with whom I have talked already; in any case, your offer comes too late."

The Earl's displeasure was so evident that Shakspere felt called upon to allay it, if possible, lest it should in some way react to injure his friends.

"Your Lordship forgets that we are already in service to Lord Hunsdon, and through him to her Majesty the Queen. We are already bound."

"Only in name," exclaimed Bed-

ford testily, "only in name! You carry his license, that is all! But some would rather be vagabonds than trusted servants!" So saying, he walked off, angry enough at the downfall of his scheme.

WELCOME YOU

CHAPTER XII

In which the players dine, and Phyllis forgets a part

PHYLLIS turned gratefully to Shakspere.

"Is he not dreadful!" she exclaimed. "We must get away from here! I feel as though I should never reach home again."

"How can my muse want subject to invent
While thou dost breathe, that pour'st into my verse
Thine own sweet argument?"

Sonnet XXXVIII.

The stimulus she had received from Florio's draught had worn off with the excitement of the play. It was now near four o'clock of the afternoon, and they had breakfasted early.

"You cannot take that long walk now, without food—let us join our comrades at dinner," said Shakspere, pitiful of her pale cheeks and tired eyes. Phyllis assented, as much for his sake as for her own. She was tired and hungry, therefore he must be.

They joined the players at table, but no sooner had they seated themselves than a servant who seemed to have been waiting for them, slipped a letter into Phyllis's hand. Her watchful neighbor observed it and saw also the rosy smile that seemed to sweep over her whole face.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed to himself, looking up and down the double row of faces. "Is there a man here who can help knowing that this is a

woman?" To her, he whispered: "What says your note?"

"That he is all impatience to see me."

"And 'he' means——"?

"Philip, of course!"

"Philip?"

"Who else? Oh, how I hate——"

"Me?"

"No, your suspicions!"

"I have none!" But he doubted even while he spoke. The dainty sheet was not such as she would have received from home. He was convinced that it was from the Earl of Southampton. Shakspere admired the Earl so greatly that he attributed his own feelings to all who came in contact with his bright particular star. He decided now to hurry this troublesome charge home as soon as might be. The very atmosphere of Whitehall had a demoralizing effect upon women; and as he

had introduced this one to Southampton, his responsibility was great.

He was musing thus, when Burbage called to him from the end of the board.

"Why so silent, Will? Is the Queen's rebuke lying heavy on your shoulders? Zounds, man, it was all meant for praise!"

"It was praise," corrected Shakspere.

"Then why so glum?"

"Your recent death, Romeo, may have oppressed me."

"Far less than it oppressed me! Life might have been a very pleasant thing, and you are responsible for the end, if anyone be. But have you heard the news?"

"There is news already? Of what?"

"Why, of ourselves! What else interests us? We shall be here another while. Midsummer Night's Dream is commanded for to-morrow. I call it

rare good luck when we are all so well practiced!"

"Not I!" exclaimed Phyllis, with difficulty concealing her consternation.

"You did well enough a few weeks ago," said Sly.

"But my thoughts have been on Juliet since then," answered Phyllis. "Helena is all but forgotten."

"Oh, peace, Philip!" cried Shakspere, in an agony lest her ignorance should betray her. "If you have any such fears, let us not wait longer here. I call a rehearsal at once."

"No, no, no!" shouted a dozen voices in protest.

Shakspere arose.

"Friends, be not over-hasty!" he said. "You shall not be disturbed. I have no will to make Philip so disliked. But the cobwebs must be brushed from his brain, for the fever has dimmed his memory. Take our share of pudding and ale in lieu of our company."

"That will suit me well," asserted Phyllis, rising hastily.

Shakspere took her hand, which slipped into his with the warm, trustful clasp of a child; and a sigh of relief escaped him as they passed out of the hall that he well knew would soon be a place of revelry too boisterous for women's ears.

They went back to the scene of the day's triumph. The theatre was deserted. They were alone. Where was now the sister's eager haste to be gone? Philip seemed to have sunk into the past, and Phyllis stood looking into Shakspere's eyes; but neither one could speak. The man was in torment, for he was in doubt. He found himself unable to fathom his companion's motives or to surmise her intentions. Did she mean to act Helena tomorrow? or would she be glad to escape from the players and from him

and forget this episode? If she left them now, how could her sudden absence be explained? To take her home meant perhaps never to see her again. That idea was not to be borne. On the other hand—and his heart tightened at the thought—she carried at this very moment a letter from Southampton. Bedford wanted to get hold of her. She was at the world's mercy in a false position, trapped in a series of fêtes that might be prolonged for a week. To take her safely home—that should have been his one desire, and yet he stood looking at her in silence while a thousand questions made tumult in his heart. The success for which he had been striving was forgotten, or remained only as a bright background for this slender scarlet figure, who seemed to centralize his dramatic power in her person. Visions of the future Rosalind, Portia and Viola,

those bright heroines of masquerade, flitted through his brain. He believed that he should think and write of Phyllis for all time.

CHAPTER XIII

Concerning a letter and a lover

IN Phyllis's heart, another tune was singing.

"I have pleased him, the great poet! He is satisfied with me, the wonderful man! Why has Philip grieved that

"Oh, how much more doth beauty beauteous seem
By that sweet ornament which truth doth give."
Sonnet LIV.

I was a woman? I can act as well as he, and I am more beautiful."

The approval of the Court could not appeal to her, for it was given to a boy; but this leader of the players knew her, and she felt strangely elated by his admiration. Moreover, there was the reaction from the despair of the last few days, for without Philip's earnings, sickness was terrible to face; and now he need not want for anything. Suddenly reproaching herself that though only in thought she had been unfaithful to him for a moment, she exclaimed:

"Oh, take me back! My poor sick boy! How much he has done for me! And now at last I have been able to serve him. How often he has said, 'Sister, do not despise me for the company I keep! My work is honest work, and the wage I earn comes home to thee.' Now what I earn shall go home

to him, and if it be more than a little, so much the better. The fever is long and grievous to bear; but silver shillings can help him to whatever he may lack. He shall have white bread and gruel made with milk and my most loving care."

"Who tends him now?" asked Shakspere.

"Our old nurse, Goody Tabitha. She is watching his every breath, I know. He was too ill to be conscious of my going. Take me to him!"

"A difficult feat," he answered, "but I am ready. Yet you are very tired. You have had no rest to-day and must have slept but ill last night, for you were awake before dawn."

"I am very tired!" she assented.

"Tell me," he continued, "do you purpose to return?"

Phyllis glanced up, surprised.

"Dare I disappoint the Queen?" she

asked. "I shall most certainly return unless Philip be a-dying."

"Which God forbid! But how did you hear from him to-day? Who sent you word of him?" pursued Shakspere, insistent on returning to the subject of the letter.

"Poor man, you are overcome with anxiety concerning me and my affairs! Were you not a poet, I should say that you must be in love. But I suppose poets take interest in all these small details for their art's sake."

"Why, Phyllis, have you any use for a lover?"

"What woman has not? I hear them spoken of as exceeding useful; they do make most devoted servants and are excellent to go on errands. If one have a weakness for ribands and comfits and even for jewels, I have heard that such things are very easily come by through lovers."

"You are mocking! And you refuse to tell me of Philip's letter!"

"Of his letter? Oh, I had forgotten! Goody sent word by the baker's boy. Poor old nurse—she was worried that I did not return; so she asked Dick to find Master Shakspere, when he brought his rolls to the Palace, and to say to him that sick Phyllis was no worse and to ask why the players were detained. She is pretending that I am the one at home."

"Oh, Phyllis! when I myself saw one of Southampton's men put a letter into your hand!" exclaimed Shakspere, hot with indignation. "What excuse is there for this idle tale?"

"What excuse indeed! You have very little intention of giving me rest or peace here. Let us delay no longer. But, sir, since a woman's word bears no weight in your mind, take this letter and read it."

Opening the letter, which was sure-

ly enough in Southampton's well-known hand, he read:

To Philip, Fairest of Women, Rarest of Men:

My excuse for addressing you shall end my letter, that you may read of necessity the feelings inspired by your performance of this day. Oh, Juliet, why are you not alive, and I, Romeo? And why, bright Dream of Womanhood, when I had stormed a Fortress and found therein one whom my unenlightened spirit called passing fair—why has your portrayal of my Ideal crossed my path to destroy the Reality that is my own? My Mistress is already jealous. Of what? Of a Phantom that lives in my mind as Beautiful and Lovable—as You are!

To my Postscript: A boy reached my apartments after you and my Will had gone. He brought a message from one, Goody Tabitha, saying that

Phyllis was no worse, but was calling for your return. I saw the boy's message to be for you, though he asked for Burbage, or Shakspere, thinking to find you the more easily through them. Master Dick has been fed and fee'd and has returned. I promised to see his message safely delivered.

My rooms are open to you and my beloved Will. Come to me to-night.

With Greetings of Admiration and Friendship, SOUTHAMPTON.

And is it strange that, as he read, Will Shakspere's heart was not wholly reassured?

CHAPTER XIV

In which Phyllis reaches home

"AND you think Southampton has no idea of your sex?"

"Why, Will, I should be frightened out of all reason at the thought! I can bear that you should know because—because I need your help. I felt that

"Then give me welcome, next my heaven the best,
Even to thy pure and most loving breast."

Sonnet CX.

you would understand. But even you despise me for what I have done. You think I would never have been so brave, had I been truly modest."

"I am amazed at what you have done! That one without training should have mastered a great art—that a young girl should have the wit for such an undertaking. I am amazed at the loveliness that kindles all hearts. But, oh, Phyllis, more am I amazed at myself! You cannot know me, for I do not know myself! Jealous? Suspicious? Passionate? I? Have the faults of boyhood returned to harass the man? Or is it my youth itself that you have brought back?"

Phyllis would not have been human, had she remained unmoved by such words from the idol of the players. A flush of delight swept over her face at his praise; but when he spoke of himself, her dark eyes grew troubled.

"You fear the influence of others for me," she said, "their flattery and vain words. Be careful, Master Shakspere, to speak only as you would that others should speak. Believe me—I know well I am no match for you! Of no one else have I any fear, and yet you know how truly I have trusted you."

Chivalry decreed that she should never call her faith misplaced.

"I shall not offend in word or deed," he said, "but you cannot forbid me to write of you!"

"Why, heaven itself would sin in restraining your rhyme!" assented Phyllis. "But now, to Philip! before we are either missed or discovered."

"We must run no risks," declared Shakspere. "See! I shall avoid complications by giving my explanation ahead of time." So saying he scribbled on a slip of paper:

Have gone to the Rose Theatre for MS. Return immediately.

W. S.

This missive he tacked upon the curtain where it must meet the eye of anyone entering the hall.

Then the two left the theatre by a side door that led into a terraced court; passing through the courtyard, they soon found themselves beyond the limits of Whitehall, and how sweet the fresh air seemed! It was to Phyllis as to one set free from prison. Needless to say, they chose to walk in quiet back lanes, for friends and enemies were equally to be avoided. Shakspere made good use of every moment.

"You have learned Juliet from Philip's study of the part," he said. "Do you need to know more of Helena?"

"Dear Helena! I have prompted Philip many a time as he learned the

lines. How like to my position was hers! Lost with Lysander in the woods no more completely than was I in the Palace!"

"Let us not talk of the Palace! We shall return all too soon."

"You do not like it there?"

"My likings are more with people than with places: I like wherever my friends may be."

"Then you love the Palace."

"Yes, to-day."

"How fickle that seems! But surely there is some spot on earth that claims your loyalty."

"Stratford-on-Avon has it, but does not claim it. A peaceful town! Let us not talk of Stratford."

"You have known sorrow there?"

"Not more than elsewhere."

"Do you, most fortunate of men, talk of sorrow? The world seems to give you all you ask."

"I ask little; much has been given

me that I do not ask; but the few simple things that make life worth while have been denied."

"What things are these?" whispered Phyllis.

"They are all comprised in one," he said, "the loving sympathy of one who understands."

"That I have always had, and may God preserve me from the loss of it!" exclaimed Phyllis, hiding her face in her hands. "I feel that Philip is very ill, and I grow more anxious as we near the house."

It is with horror that we approach the possibility of death. The two paused in the doorway, hardly daring to enter. As they mounted the stairs, Shakspere laid a detaining hand on Phyllis. In her impetuous haste, she had no thought but of reaching Philip with all speed.

"Not thus arrayed!" exclaimed

Shakspere. "Your dress, Phyllis, would betray your secret. It must needs be altered before you greet our boy. He must not be distressed nor excited."

She saw the wisdom of the suggestion, and threw aside her cloak, promising to change her attire before she went to Philip. Inside the door, Goody Tabitha met them. At sight of Phyllis, she burst into tears, throwing her apron over her head and sobbing bitterly.

"He is dead! Philip!" screamed the sister wildly, rushing toward her brother's door. But in answer to her voice, another called out: "Phyllis!" and entering she knelt beside the pallet on which the boy lay. He was pale, the fever had left him and his eyes were closed in the exhaustion that comes between the crisis and convalescence.

"Phyllis," he whimpered, brokenly, "where—where have you been? I have called you——"

"And I came!"

"No—you did not come. I have called, called—and called—you were not here."

Tears of weakness rolled down his cheeks. Phyllis kissed them away.

Shakspere stood behind her in the doorway, sorrowfully watching the pair. The evening shadows were beginning to fall, and he was in no danger of being seen.

"Tell me!" whispered Philip, petulantly.

"Dearest, I will tell you, but you know without the telling, that if I was not with you, I was doing something for you."

"Don't leave me again!" he pleaded.

Phyllis did not answer, but kissed him, tears running down her cheeks.

With a sigh of satisfaction and relief, he clasped her hand in his, and then, soothed by her sweet presence, fell asleep.

CHAPTER XV

In which Shakspere defends the players

THE sobbing of the old woman in the next room intruded upon the silence.

Shakspere turned to comfort her.

"Mistress Tabitha, be of

"Thence comes it that thy name receives a brand."
Sonnet CXI.

better cheer. My fears are somewhat allayed by the sleep that has fallen upon our sufferer."

Mistress Tabitha pulled the apron from off her head, showing a furrowed, tear-stained face. Her little black eyes burned angrily.

"I weep not for Philip, but for the one who can never be well again, nor recover what she has lost—her good name!"

"Now, Goody, such words cannot pass. Who knows of what your little cousin has done? The secret must be well kept, and the world will be none the wiser."

"You know of it yourself, pretty sir!" cried the crone. "I did but try you, and you confess plainly enough that one of the players knows who trips 'neath the little scarlet cloak! Shame upon you and your crew! And she—betrothed to an honest man who will never look her in the face again!"

Shakspere glanced toward the next room, fearing lest these words had reached the twins. Then he softly closed the door, and with a majestic stride, approached the old woman.

"Goody," he asked sternly, "whose fault is this? How dared you send her down to us in Burbage's arms?"

"Did I send her, sir? Lord, who could have held her back? You were going to carry off a dying lad!"

"That does not explain! Answer me! You did not wish to let Philip go?"

"No, nor would not!"

"Phyllis has always been a modest, virtuous girl?"

"God knows it, sir!"

"Who put such a thought then into her head? You bewitched her, Goody!" he exclaimed, before the terrified old creature could answer. "To save Philip, you bewitched her! And if by tears or words against her, you let one

breath of dishonor attach to her name, I shall see you reported to the sheriff."

"Now Heaven be my witness, I, a poor old dame——"

"No words, no words! This must go no further, do you understand?"

"Alas, sir, what will her brother say?"

"Who is to tell him?"

"Why, sir, how can she explain herself?"

"Leave that to her."

"And all her beauty gone!"

"Beauty? Pray, who has stolen that away?"

"Her hair, sir! Did you not know her braids of hair? Her mother's hair, but twice over! Two strands the like of which are not in London! And she cut it off without a word or even a moment's pause! What would her mother say? Dear gentle lady! What would her father say? Noble gentleman that he was! For, sir, Bloody Queen Mary

has brought them to this pass. Good Protestants, their fine estate went to the Crown, and the poor father died in prison. My sweet young mistress never smiled after that. Thank God she soon followed her good husband! Thank God she never lived to see this day!"

Heavy steps were now heard ascending the stair, and the old woman jumped up, gasping:

"Oh, 'tis Master Revelation Reeves! Whatever shall I do?"

Shakspere pushed her back into her chair, with a command to be silent. "Cry if you like, but don't venture to speak!" he said.

The door opened, and a man of enormous stature entered the room. He was clad in the stately, homely Puritan costume of gray; massive and rugged, he seemed like a stone tower; thick iron-gray hair hung to his shoulders. After the custom of his sect, he neither

removed his hat nor made any formal greeting. Looking first at Shakspere, then at Goody Tabitha, he delivered himself of the remark that God had all souls in His keeping. Shakspere's silence and the old woman's broken sobs confirmed this statement.

The Puritan then addressed himself to Shakspere, taking him naturally enough to be the physician.

"Learned sir," he exclaimed, "you are doubtless in this house of woe trying to mitigate the stern judgments of an angry God. It were better to leave my young brother in peace. On a bed of weakness and pain let him learn the purposes of the Father who chastens him. Plainly in this instance is the Divine hand dissuading him from a life of vanity and folly."

"The hand of a godless man or of the devil has wrought this harm," re-

plied Shakspere. "Why lay it to God?"

"I know not of the circumstances," answered the other, somewhat astonished. "But if it be as you say, the more it behooves my young relative to remove himself from associations that render his life unsafe. I am the more closely concerned in this matter, because I fear such influences for his sister, Mistress Patience, whom I have called to see."

"Mistress Patience! I do not know of her."

"Perhaps the more worldly name of Phyllis has reached you. Is she within, Mistress Tabitha?"

Goody Tabitha opened her mouth to speak; but the reply ended in a groan, for Shakspere had fixed a menacing glance upon her. Mistress Phyllis in a player's red raiment was not a sight for Puritan eyes; but for Mistress Patience, the costume seemed

even more amiss! The man would crush her in a righteous rage.

"Mistress Phyllis is within," answered Shakspere calmly, "but she is so occupied in her ministrations to her brother that it would not be well to interrupt her or to disturb him."

"Let her fail in nothing, and, sir, if aught is required for which the means of this household seem inadequate, I shall be here from time to time ready to defray such expenses as you may deem advisable. Moreover, sir, if I might ask you to be of a peculiar service to me, I would gladly double your accustomed fee."

An amused smiled flitted over Shakspere's face.

"You are offering me a bribe, I fear, worthy sir, and I must assure you that I have not an itching palm. If the peculiar service you ask is one that it befits me to give, I shall be honored to oblige you."

"Sir physician, you do not know to whom you speak, if you imagine that Revelation Reeves could seek a favor that would demean the donor. No, I ask only your help for the soul of this diseased boy. I am seeking to turn him aside from the path of destruction. Advise him that his health will never permit him to return among the players. Their drinking, gluttony, debauchery, irregularity and——"

"Their list of offenses must be great," broke in Shakspere, "and you doubtless speak from personal experience and intercourse with these degraded people; but spare me, sir, I have no wish to hear further of them. A priest gave me not long since a scathing description of the Puritans, whom he declared to be without a redeeming feature; but on the following day, a Puritan gave me an equally unpleasant description of the priests. I am an honest man, sir; and, believe me,

I know not where to turn for companions. Concerning the favor you ask, our opinions differ. It would demean me to press my views upon a sick man; so did I agree with you in regard to the players, I should still refuse; but as it is, let me confess that I have a hearty respect and admiration for them. They seem to me, on the whole, a generous, frank and well-meaning set of men. Moreover, their vocation is one which has its origin in religion. They are teachers and interpreters of life. The Miracle Plays are only acted sermons."

"Relics of Popery! But I see you will be of no assistance to me, sir. Once more may I inquire for Mistress Patience?" And he turned to Goody Tabitha. "I will await her here."

CHAPTER XVI

In which good comrades run away

SHAKSPERE entered Philip's room; Phyllis was kneeling by the bed, and her brother still slept. Twilight had veiled all in its shadows, but the fact that Phyllis wore masculine attire and that

"For thee I watch whilst thou dost wake elsewhere,
From me far off, with others all too near!"
Sonnet LXI.

her hair hung short on her shoulders could hardly be concealed even with the help of the coming darkness.

"Phyllis," he said, "one, Revelation Reeves, is waiting without to see you; but it is time for us to be gone if you still intend to return with me."

Phyllis gave a terrified start.

"Revelation Reeves! Oh, how I fear that man! So cold, so hard and relentless! Philip has always come between him and me and lent me courage; but now without Philip, I cannot face him. And, oh heavens, I had forgotten this attire! And my hair is gone! Shakspere, what shall I do?"

"You wish to return with me?"

"Oh, yes, yes, I fear only to be left behind!"

"If you failed to return, Lord Hunsdon would send here to-morrow to demand explanations."

"Which I could not give. And if I go, who will be the wiser?"

"Goody Tabitha, perhaps, and Revelation Reeves."

"I care not. I try to think only of Philip. When he recovers, how rejoiced he will be to find that his work has not suffered—that he is still in favor at Court and has even won praise!"

"Do not deceive yourself, Phyllis, he may feel that you have run too great risks and have made too big a sacrifice!"

Phyllis jumped up, laughing softly. "You do not understand," she said. "Philip and I think alike; twins always do. He will say, 'Sister, you are braver than I thought, and have done more than I supposed lay in a woman's power to do! You have kept my place for me among the players and saved me from disgrace. Thank you, my sister, no one can ever love you as I do, and I can never thank you enough for what you have done.' "

"You think he will say all that?"

"I think he will feel it. I know he will feel it. There will be no need to say it all."

"Then you will return with me?"

"Yes, but how? Will they let me?"

"Walk close beside me. I will hide you between me and the wall. Step when I step and pause when I stop to speak. They have no candle."

"But first I must see Goody! I must tell her what to do for Philip!"

"She knows as well as you do what should be done for Philip. Truly, I think he will be much improved by to-morrow. His sleep is deep and sound, and a bowl of fresh milk on awakening will greatly restore his strength." Here Shakspere bethought himself of the remaining contents of the phial in his pocket. "This wonderful Italian elixir will insure his speedy recovery," he exclaimed. "I had it for him from John Florio, and the greater part of it

has been wasted on you!" He poured the fluid into a glass and set it on a chair beside the bed. "I can give Goody full directions," he continued, "if you will but do as I have said. Keep close to me!"

The light was dim in the outer room.

Shakspere held his cloak loosely over his arm; and as he walked, Phyllis was close on his right side. He hid her slight figure carefully and deliberately and detained her firmly with his right hand when he stopped to speak.

"Mistress Tabitha, give my patient a bowl of warm milk when he awakens and pour into it the medicine I have left in his glass. He is in a deep sleep, which, I trust, will last until morning. Let no one see him or disturb him on any account. Let no one enter his room unless he call. And you are to speak very little, Goody, and softly."

A few steps more, and they had

reached the door; here he paused to address the Puritan:

"Master Reeves, Mistress Patience bids you make use of that virtue which is her name; and if she comes not anon, it will be only because her duties have detained her."

Revelation Reeves bowed his head in acquiescence. There was a look of calm persistence in his pose that boded a lengthy stay, and as the door closed behind them, Shakspere whispered:

"I warrant you, that granite column will not budge till morning. We have planned a pleasant night for him, which he will spend in happy thoughts of you, feeling your presence near."

Phyllis disagreed.

"He comes only from a sense of duty, and that will not keep him long. A message left for me with Mistress Tabitha will serve his ends."

"Do not believe a man who says he comes to see you from a sense of duty,

Phyllis. I have no special liking for Puritans, yet this one did not strike me as quite a fool. Keep pace with me. They must not hear double steps upon the stairs."

When the two reached the outer door, Phyllis paused in some trepidation. "If he should be looking from the window!"

"It is too dark for him to recognize us. But Goody will soon be in that forbidden room to hear of your adventures."

They hurried away from the house and breathed more freely when they had turned a corner and the familiar neighborhood was left well behind them.

Then Shakspere spoke:

"Do I understand, Phyllis, that Revelation Reeves is your betrothed husband? I cannot believe Goody Tabitha told the truth in saying so."

"And why not?" asked Phyllis.

Shakspere's heart stood still. But it could not be true!

"You seem entirely your own mistress, Phyllis. Surely you will take counsel of none but your own feelings in so grave a matter!"

"Not unless it is forced upon me! Master Reeves is our guardian since our father's death. He is a country gentleman of wealth, interested only in the welfare of his soul. Our poverty and distress have in no way disturbed him; but when Philip left the Cathedral players, to join a company of veritable actors, Revelation Reeves came post haste to London, fearing that the immortal souls in his charge were in danger. You should have heard Philip talk to him! So bravely, so nobly in defense of his art and of his friends! How I loved him for it! Dear Philip, he is so loyal! Master Reeves could do nothing with him. But where I was concerned, they agreed

better, and I am to be betrothed before the year is out to some godly man of my guardian's choosing."

"To himself?"

"Truly, I do not know. I think not, for he is not yet sufficiently assured of my sobriety and dignity. He has never talked to me of the matter."

"If he hears aught of this escapade, he will be very angry."

"But why need he know, Will Shakspere?"

"Little rose that you are, how could you bloom in the shadow of such a wall? I hope the man may learn all and wash his hands of you."

"I should not grieve. I am happier with Philip—and with you."

Her whole heart went out to him in grateful affection, and she knew of no reason to deny the new delight that filled her. "He will trust me and forget to be jealous or suspicious when he

knows I would please him rather than the others," she thought.

And he? The temptation was too great. His arm slipped unrebuked around her. Why not? It was but a poet and a lad who walked along the Thames toward Whitehall. That they were happier than others, what passer-by knew?

The moon came up and shone intermittently behind a host of small black clouds that scudded angrily by her.

"See," cried Phyllis, "they try to put her light out, and think they have conquered her; but she only rises on into the night."

"Like a blameless soul," murmured Shakspere, with a sigh that came from the depths of his being.

Phyllis sighed in sympathy. "It is all so beautiful," she whispered. "Is it wrong that I am not grieving more for Philip? He will soon be well. I think only of his surprise when he

knows all I have done! Truly, he will be amazed, will he not? Never can he say that it was to no purpose our father taught me in his company. For, Shakspere, you do not know the full list of my accomplishments. I have even made verses. Oh, poetry, I adore it!

"Shakspere!" She turned to him with tremulous eagerness. "Write something for me! Something that I can have for my own! Lines on this beautiful night—the moon shining on the Thames—something I can keep for always!"

With what pretty innocence, she courted her own undoing! Surely, no fair ship with white sails set ever made more gloriously for the destroying reef. The poet was only a man.

CHAPTER XVII

In which a poet makes love

"A SONNET for you, Phyllis? Why, my heart is full of them! Listen!" He paused a moment and then began:

"Thine eyes I love——"

"For nothing this wide universe I call,
Save thou, my rose; in it, thou art my all."
Sonnet CIX.

"Oh, no—the night!" Phyllis interrupted.

"That comes in after: it begins—

"Thine eyes I love, and they, as pitying me—
Knowing thy heart torments me with disdain—
Have put on black and loving mourners be,
Looking with pretty ruth upon my pain." . . .

Phyllis held her breath.

"And truly not the morning sun of heaven
Better becomes the gray cheeks of the east,
Nor that full star that ushers in the even,
Doth half that glory to the sober west

As those two mourning eyes become
thy face.
Oh, let it then as well beseem thy
heart
To mourn for me since mourning doth
thee grace,
And suit thy pity like in every part;
Then I will swear beauty herself is
black
And none are fair that thy complexion
lack."

Silence followed, broken only by the water lapping below the embankment.

At last, Phyllis faltered:

"I cannot believe that it was new for me! Surely—you had thought of it before."

"Yes, every time I have looked at you, it has been in my thoughts; but, Phyllis, it has never been in words before!"

"A sonnet, and to me! No one shall

ever hear it from your lips as I have——"

"Reward me with a kiss! So!

"Your lips come after your eyes. And only to-day they were cruel! Listen:

"Those lips that Love's own hand did make
Breathed forth the sound that said 'I hate'
To me that languished for her sake;
But when she saw my woeful state,
Straight in her heart did mercy come,
Chiding the tongue that ever sweet
Was used in giving gentle doom,
And taught it thus anew to greet:
'I hate' she altered with an end,
That followed it as gentle day
Doth follow night, who like a friend
From heaven to hell is flown away;
'I hate' from hate away she threw,
And saved my life, saying—'not you.'"

"Not you," echoed Phyllis. "Oh, no, indeed! But it was you who were unkind."

"But I love you, Phyllis!"

"Do I love you, Will?"

"No, no, do not say it. You would not mean it."

"But I think I do."

"I cannot believe it."

"But you must."

"No, no! Think of my position, Phyllis! I cannot drag you down to this level."

"I shall not call it down."

"Would you renounce the possibility of ever becoming the honored wife of such a man as——"

"For your sake? Oh, how can you ask! The happiness of being yours is far, far greater."

Yours meant "your wife" to Phyllis, but it could not mean that to Will Shakspere while Mistress Anne dwelt placidly in Stratford.

"You could not be happy with me alone," he said.

"Forever!" she insisted.

"While you loved me!"

"So long as you loved me."

"That would be forever!" he exclaimed.

"So I believe."

"But I who am older and wiser cannot believe in your continued love. Phyllis, I know women too well. For a week or a month, I could make you content, and then—if you should reproach me, there would be left me but death in life."

"Believe me, Shakspere, I am not like others! I fail you? I reproach you? Oh, my dear love, a thousand times, no!"

He clasped her to his breast.

"You accept me, then, as your lover?"

"Yes!"

"You consent to belong to me, to me alone?"

"I am yours alone. How can I belong to another?"

"Then this is the hour for which my soul was made. The long years have brought me to it by devious ways, but the sorrows of the past are as nothing! No grief can overtake me but the loss of you——"

"Speak not of that, dear love, you have too little faith."

"Then teach it me."

"Truly, I will try, and yet, even I can hardly believe!"

Oh, beautiful night and golden moon and lovers vows too hastily and too tenderly plighted! The wonder of a dream was in it all, and the fear of waking now and again breathed a chill breath over each heart. But he only drew her the closer to him, and she only pressed his hand the tighter to her breast.

CHAPTER XVIII

In which misfortune threatens a friend

THEY reached the Palace toward nine, having been more than two hours returning over a distance that had taken them less than an hour earlier in the day. Making their way at once to the theatre, they

"From where thou art why should I haste me thence?"

Sonnet LI.

found Lord Hunsdon and several of the players talking over the notice on the curtain.

"This must be the second time, then," Sly was saying. "He slipped away a little after five, for I was in here looking for him, and 'tis plain he had to go back again for something."

"I would have sent a man!" exclaimed Lord Hunsdon. "Faith! the fellow is walking his legs off, while we have need of him."

"I am here at your service, my Lord," said Shakspere, stepping forward.

" 'Tis well! I was seeking you."

"Where shall I attend you, my Lord?"

"At my apartments."

"I shall be there with all speed."

"You may come with me at once."

"Pardon me; but with your Lordship's leave, I must first inform the Earl of Southampton, who awaits

me." So saying, Shakspere hurried off with the faithful little shadow who had followed him all day.

"Oh, Phyllis, I cannot bear to leave you for a moment," he whispered. "My precious little jewel-casket, what corner is safe enough to hide you in?"

"I am very tired," she answered. "Let me go to rest at once."

"That will be best. And I will come to you the moment I am free of this business. I know not what it is, but I hate it even without knowing, for it keeps me away from you."

Once more they entered Southampton's rooms, which were unoccupied as on the previous evening.

"I dread to leave you, Phyllis, I know not why!" Shakspere cried. "My soul senses some calamity to you."

"You are over-anxious because of my false position here," she said, "and I, too, am distressed since you are. But I will slip into the little room, and

no one shall know that I am hidden there."

"Good!" he exclaimed, somewhat reassured. "And, Phyllis, promise me not to stir until I return!"

"Yes."

"Dearest—most beautiful! You know that I shall hasten."

"There is no need. I shall be safe enough."

Shakspere sought the Lord Chamberlain.

Lord Hunsdon was in most affable humor. He greeted Shakspere with a friendliness and cordiality that was well understood to indicate a coming request. After some words of unqualified praise as to the actors and the play of the morning, and some kindly questions and suggestions as to the performance of the morrow, there came a pause. Shakspere, who was burning with eagerness to seek

his new-found idol, made an effort to escape.

"My Lord," he said, "you have affairs of more importance on hand. Do not keep me in suspense, but let me know at once how I can serve you."

"Since you make it thus easy for me to begin, Master Shakspere, I will come to the point at once. You will be deeply interested, even concerned at what I purpose to relate. It is not too much to say that you are a friend to his Grace of Southampton—that he is in fact, your patron?"

"It is not saying too much, nor even half enough. His Lordship is my most undeservedly kind friend and patron, and I am his most devoted admirer and humble servant."

"Hum! Ah! Then you would doubtless feel a desire to serve him if need were?"

"Who can suggest a service that I

may render to my Lord, does me a real favor."

"Well, well, this is as I hoped. His Lordship has need of friends; he is in some danger. His mother is in great distress to-night."

"Her ladyship spoke to me yesterday. She is seeking a marriage for her son——"

"No, no—not now! Trying to avoid it, rather! For, Master Shakespere, it is already whispered and loudly whispered that the Earl is courting Mistress Vernon with too great familiarity."

"Truly, he seems attached to her."

"Oh, these women! Master Shakspere, beware of a dark lady! The Queen does well to distrust them. A power of mischief lurks in a brown eye! And black tresses are a veritable snare! But this must not come about. The Queen would never brook it. Mistress Vernon has some hold on South-

ampton through her cousin Essex, but even he would not approve the match. Lord Southampton must seek a woman higher in rank; he must seek a richer woman—a better woman! A very different woman in fact! And he can afford to wait a year or two rather than to make such a misalliance as this would be."

"It can be arranged then, I am sure, my Lord; all the Earl desires is permission to wait a little longer. Unless forced into it, there is no reason why he should marry; for, my Lord, as you well know, his mistress is already so kind that he has little left to gain."

"Too true! But I am sure the lady wishes it, and her influence may be powerful. You know what a designing woman can do with a hot-headed young man!"

"Then what do you suggest, my Lord?"

"That in some way you make an ef-

fort to divert our friend. If, for instance, he could be brought into a mild intrigue with some other woman, or if he could have some occasion for foreign travel. The latter would be best. These are simply points for you to touch on. I want you to use your influence. You know that Essex leaves shortly with the army for Cadiz. That would be a good opening."

"In this matter I cannot promise, my Lord; it is little to my liking to try to force my opinions or those of others upon a friend. I have already refused one such request this evening. My influence is somewhat over-rated I do assure you."

"But I wish you to know that imprisonment would follow any attempt on his Lordship's part to marry one of the Queen's maids without her Majesty's consent."

"Surely, then, Mistress Vernon could never wish to ruin him!"

"She would ruin him fast enough in order to have him! Such a fine young man, too! It is a pity! I wanted you as his friend to know. That is all. Pray do what you can."

Shakspere took a hurried leave, after promising to do his best. He was less impressed by this unpleasant news than he would have been a few days before. To return to Phyllis! that was all his thought. He re-entered Southamptons' chamber, and gave thanks that it was empty. He crossed to the door of the little room in which his beloved lay hid.

"Phyllis," he whispered. But she had been very tired, perhaps she was now asleep! There came no response, and he assured himself that he had expected none. He lifted the latch of the door very softly and opened it a little way.

"Phyllis!" he said again. Then he closed the door, and curbing his impa-

tience, resolutely determined not to enter the room as his whole soul cried out to do.

"God forbid that I should intrude upon my lady's sleep," he said to himself. "No, let me wait until she can assure me of my welcome."

"Truly," he added, "love maketh of a proud man an excellent slave." There was no sleep for his eyes, but he pulled the couch before her door as on the previous night and lay listening for the slightest sound that should tell him Phyllis waked or in her dreams whispered his name.

CHAPTER XIX

In which Phyllis meets with a great loss.

WHEN Shakspere left her, Phyllis went, as she had promised, into the little wardrobe off of Southampton's room. She was just within and had not had time

"My grief lies onward, and my joy behind."
Sonnet L.

to close the door when the young Earls of Southampton and Bedford entered the apartment. Not wishing to make her presence known by the click of the latch, she gently pulled the door to. Her heart was so full of happiness that the little room seemed to hold all the stars of heaven and all the flowers of the field. The moon, too, was there, shining on the Thames; she had brought with her all the beautiful, never-to-be-forgotten night. She still felt her lover's arm about her, and the music of his words was in her ears; but her ecstatic mood was harshly dispelled when the laughter of the two Lords in the adjoining room broke rudely upon her. Then Southampton's clear voice rang out mockingly:

"No, Bedford, no! Fortune has already blessed you beyond your deserts! My contingent is none too large, and those who attach themselves to me for love, I shall reward in kind. You

shall not take one away from me, no, not one! If it had been my doing, why, then it were a different matter!"

"If it had been your doing, I should not ask anything of you! I would not take away the scamp, if you had hired him! But of all the brazen effrontery! To tell me with such an honest face that he was already considering service under you!"

"He was, he was!" laughed Southampton. "I did not know it, that is all; he was considering it, and if he knows his mind now and wants it, he has got it!"

"But, zounds! I wanted that boy, and you care nothing about him."

"You mistake," replied Southampton sweetly, "I do care now—I love all who have the good taste to love me. I would not part with Philip for anything you could offer!"

"You are easy prey, my Lord," snorted Bedford, then turning back as

he was about to leave the room, he sent a Parthian shaft.

"Your dear Shakspere is this minute plotting to ruin you with Mistress Vernon! Hunsdon has just sought him after an interview with your mother, and he is engaging to turn your interests elsewhere."

"That dear friend cannot seem to do enough for me," responded Southampton, "he has me always on his heart, and I doubt not you are right about this matter. Shakspere knows that ennui is ruinous to my beauty and to my temper. He is often quicker than I to detect its approach."

"If he had spent less time planning for your wife and more time taking care of his own, you would both be better off."

"Mistress Anne is quite well and happy," retorted Southampton. "You have been misinformed if anyone has told you to the contrary."

Bedford left, slamming the heavy door after him, and Southampton continued to laugh for some time after the other had gone. Then he straightened himself up, and an amused twinkle came into his eyes.

"This Philip does seem eminently desirable! If I could only know whether Shakspere had brought the witch here for me or for himself, I might tell better how to proceed. Perhaps this is his plan to turn me aside from my present flame. Will Shakspere's taste is beyond all praise. Heavens, was not that Juliet something to die for!"

At this moment, the wardrobe door opened, and as if in response to his unspoken desire, the face he was thinking of appeared before him.

"Ah, little Philip," exclaimed Southampton, "I was but now speaking of you."

"And I, my Lord, a forced listener

to you and my Lord of Bedford, must confess the fault——"

"And receive absolution full and free."

"If I am pardoned, may I ask of your Grace a favor?"

"Yes, and I grant it before it is asked. You wish to enter my service; I will have you gladly, but only with Master Shakspere's consent: only with Master Shakspere's consent, mind you, for I am very loyal to my friends."

"Then be my friend, my Lord, and help me!" entreated Phyllis. "It is not of entering service that I wish to speak, but of another matter. I know not how to explain myself, but oh, my Lord, help me, help me to get away!"

Southampton leaned back and surveyed her with cool amazement.

"Little friend, I cannot be sure whether you are acting now or not! Your vehemence surprises me no less than the strangeness of the favor you

ask. Pray, where is it that you wish to be escorted at this hour? What part of Whitehall demands your presence for the rest of the night? Perchance you are not comfortably bestowed in that closet room?" he added, as an afterthought. "Believe me, there is nothing here but what is at your service."

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed the frightened girl.

"Tell me, sweet, what is it that you want?"

It flashed through Phyllis's mind that it would take a good answer to save her from the double disaster of Shakspere's returning and finding her again with Southampton.

"I have lost something," she said, "a jewel I prize more than anything else in the world. I had it this morning, and now it is gone. I cannot rest until I have at least looked about the stage for it."

"Is it a ring that you have lost?"

"No, my Lord, a heart; one left me by my mother."

"I have never noticed it; where did you carry it?"

"As an amulet on my breast, my Lord. It was too precious to show."

"Of gold?"

"Of pure gold, my Lord. I have never been without it."

"When did you discover the loss?"

"While you were talking with the Earl."

Here Phyllis burst into tears, bitter tears! All she had said was true, and it came over her with a hopeless sense of bitterness and shame. Her heart was not only lost; it was crushed and broken.

"What! weeping?" exclaimed Southampton. "I cannot believe you would take the loss of a childish trinket so seriously! I shall be glad to replace it for you."

"No one can replace it, my Lord."

"Then we shall find it in the morning."

"I am going to seek it now."

"No, I think it best to keep you here a little longer. Will Shakspere will soon return," said Southampton, laying a detaining hand upon her arm.

By this time, Phyllis was in mad haste to be gone.

"My Lord," she said, her eyes flashing dangerously, "I have a most unruly temper. If you seek to cross me, I shall forget all your past kindness and give a scream that will wake the farthest echoes."

"A scream is very easily stifled," retorted Southampton, looking much amused.

"But as a host," he continued, "force does not become me. I will go with you to the theatre. It is not lighted now."

So saying, he took a hand-lamp and followed her into the hall.

Phyllis made no objection; she was well satisfied to have a companion through the dim corridors, and the lit-the wick flared up brightly at every turn and cast its friendly light into the dark corners where suspicious shadows lurked.

Ye Tower of London

CHAPTER XX

In which the Earl endeavors to console

WHEN they reached the theatre, Southampton stepped ahead, opened the door and took a careful survey; then he closed the door softly and turned back again.

"Beshrew that heart that makes my heart to groan
For that deep wound it gives my friend and me!"
Sonnet CXXXIII.

"It is just as I thought, you little witch," he exclaimed, "Burbage is there on the stage waiting for you. Please throw aside this masquerade. If you are tired of Shakspere, take—me!"

For a moment, Phyllis was too frightened to speak. Then, "My Lord, you are jesting!" she gasped.

"No, I am in earnest."

"You know who I am?"

"I know you are not what you pretend to be."

"You refuse to let me enter here?"

"I do."

"And if I insist?"

"I shall prevent you."

"I shall call to Burbage for help!" exclaimed Phyllis.

"Your call will never be heard." He shook out his silken kerchief. "I should smother it with——"

"You would—strangle—me?" faltered Phyllis.

"Oh, what a child you are! Hurt you? Not for worlds! I should smother your scream with kisses. Would you mind that so much?"

She made no response and stood a moment, thinking. Her plight seemed desperate.

"My Lord," she said at last, "I admired and respected you last night when you told me of your love for the most beautiful lady in the Court! Think now how you are falling in my esteem! What, sir, is more to be condemned than an unfaithful lover?"

"Why, there is only one answer to that—a faithless lady is more to be condemned, as all the world admits. But, in this Court, pardons are easily had for the one and for the other. Our Virgin Queen shines all the more resplendent in contrast with the frailties of those who surround her!"

"And yet, you, sir, I should expect to find above these swaying fancies—a

knight whose loyalty has been called steadfast as the North Star!"

The Earl blushed. He was not proud of the part he was playing. Mistress Vernon and Will Shakspere were both like to be betrayed. Yet for his life, he could not have torn himself away from this bewildering girl in the page's suit of red.

"It is not right that you should chide me," he said, "for I follow your eyes bewitched, as do all who see you. Moreover, my loyalty is proven in my guarding a treasure that rightly belongs to my friend. Tell me truly, is not Shakspere your lover?"

Phyllis clasped her hands to her breast where her heart seemed like to break. Why had she tried to escape from that dearest of men? Why had she not waited and told him all—told him how impossible it would be for her to be the blot upon the fair pages of his honor! She could have trusted him,

she should have trusted him! Ah yes, and then she admitted to herself that she had fled because she could not have trusted herself! At his side, the rest of the world would have lost its due proportion: she would have realized only that she had found her world in him. And that other—Mistress Anne—would have slipped so far into the background as to be forgotten.

"My Lord," she said, "I have run away from Will Shakspere. I am a girl, as you have guessed; but what you will not believe, I am an honest girl most unhappy. I took my brother's place with the players because he was sick unto death. I was kept here by force last night, but Will Shakspere guarded me safely in your little room. He is good and kind, as are you, my Lord. Now leave me—just to show that you believe what I have said."

"What you have said does not explain your being here to-night."

"No!" She raised a lovely, tearful face to his and then cast down her eyes. "My Lord, I have lived and died since yesterday. To-night Will Shakspere told me that he loved me! I confessed my love for him. I thought to be his wife!"

"His wife!" It was now Southampton's turn to be astonished.

"I knew nothing of Mistress Anne," she continued, "until I heard you speak of her to-night. He said he loved me, but it was my fault! I tried so hard to please him! He spoke of his sad position—I thought he meant the profession of which he is really proud. Oh, I was blindly foolish, but I led him on, not knowing; and now how shall I face him? My Lord, you must go to him. Tell him of the mistake I have made! Ask him to forgive me, as I forgive him, and to forget—as I can never do."

"You knew nothing of Mistress

Anne? Why, Shakspere has used you shamefully! Shamefully indeed!" said the Earl with virtuous indignation.

"Oh, no, the fault was all mine! I forgot a woman's place. But after what I told him he will never, never understand!"

"Well, since knowing something of Mistress Anne grieves you so greatly, why not know less of her and forget her altogether?" suggested the Earl.

"Alas, I am sick with sorrow," mourned Phyllis, "but no deed of mine shall ever make my mother to weep in her grave."

"My advice is to forget Mistress Anne. It is very easily done; she never has been to London. How do we know that she really exists at all? She demands far less attention than other ladies our poet's brain creates."

"But she is still his wife. Is she beautiful? No, no! I do not wish to hear of her nor to think more of him."

"This is verily beauty in distress! How shall I best console you?" he said, and kissed her. But Phyllis was too wretched to care.

"Will Shakspere hath a rare charm, but there are other men!"

"There is none comes after the King! He shall be my King always; afar from me but faithfully loved. Now look again into the theatre, my Lord, I think I heard the side door close. By this time, Burbage is gone."

They entered. The stage was deserted.

The moon which had lighted Phyllis's walk was now in mid-sky, and on the floor lay pools of white light from the upper windows.

"A grewsome place in which to leave a weeping girl alone," he muttered. "Sweet one, if you will go back with me, I promise you peaceful rest. Not a word, not a whisper, shall disturb you."

"There is no rest where the players are, I have found that out!" she answered wearily. "Here, my Lord! See! This is where I shall sleep to-night."

Juliet's bier was her couch. She folded the black draperies over her and closed her eyes.

The Earl of Southampton looked at her in dismay. "Oh, not there!" he entreated. "It is too forbidding."

She looked up with a sad little smile.

"I am safe here, and you have been kind."

"Perchance you are safe, but you are not happy. And I am at a loss how to explain this to Will Shakspere. I shall say nothing at all to him of your whereabouts."

"That is well. I wish not to see him."

"I am sorry for him. He loves a lady who runs away from love."

"Oh, no, my Lord! Not from love, but from shame and disgrace. It

could never have come about but for my folly."

"You are a little Puritan; but the Puritans will never want you back among them after this play-acting."

"I care not. I have done no wrong. My brother will understand."

"Well, sweetheart, if trouble befalls you, count upon me as a friend. There are many ways in which I might be of service to you; and there is nothing that I should refuse. Since your loss cannot be mended, I shall make no effort to replace it; but wear this token as a sign of my affection and regard. It will secure speech with me for yourself or for any messenger by whom you may choose to send it."

With these words, he took from among the jewels that he wore a little heart of gold such as she had described. It bore his monogram and crest in beautiful workmanship—a fact that Phyllis was in no mood to appreciate.

She could not know that the locket, and the chain from which the Earl now proceeded to suspend it, were intended originally as a gift for Elizabeth Vernon; and so she let him clasp the chain around her neck, but made no fitting show of gratitude.

Then, most unwillingly, the Earl left her.

And thus it happened that while the Puritan watched before one door and Will Shakspere before another, Phyllis lay crying alone, in the great deserted hall.

CHAPTER

XXI

In which everyone is miserable

SOUTHAMPTON entered his apartments in a depressed frame of mind. The sight of Shakspere resting before the door of the empty room disturbed him further. He felt no desire to tell his

"Dost thou desire my slumbers should be broken
While shadows like to thee do mock my sight?"
Sonnet LXI.

friend that the bird had flown; such discoveries some soon enough in the natural course of events. While grieved for Shakspere's loss and for Phyllis's unhappiness, he was also disconcerted at his own position. As an honorable man it was his duty to marry Elizabeth Vernon; that might mean ruin. His passion for her had been intense, but it had been easily gratified! He could have wished her more like the little Puritan. "And sweets grown common lose their dear delight," he mused, quoting from his poet. "Oh, Betty Vernon—oh, Lady Juliet! what a sad maze you have me in!"

Matters had reached such a pass that he must either marry his lady-love or leave the Court. He was willing to marry her, had his guardians sanctioned the match. He did not care enough for her to face imprisonment, perhaps death, for her sake; the

first wild enthusiasm of his love was over. It seemed to the Earl that he was more seriously involved than were these unfortunate players, for no honorable escape was left him. "I fear I shall be forced to develop a martial spirit and sail with Essex for Spain," he said to himself, "but that is not solving the problem, it is only running away." Wherein he spoke the truth, as history was to prove.

Southampton retired, without confiding his perplexities to Shakspere, who was feigning a sleep as peaceful as that which shortly overtook the Earl. No sooner did the young man's even breathing assure the poet that he slept, than Shakspere was up and at work upon his everlasting rhymes by the light of the little lamp that had guided his sweetheart's steps away from him. He was eagerly planning a series of sonnets to Phyllis on the theme of love, a companion series to

the sonnets on friendship that he had nearly completed in honor of his patron. The morning dawned without his becoming aware that Phyllis was absent.

At sunrise, he was interrupted by a knock at the outer door; hastening into the hall he found Burbage there. The great tragedian seemed much distraught. He could hardly speak, and his teeth fairly chattered.

"Come with me!" he exclaimed, seizing Shakspere's hand. "Come, there is a ghost abroad. I am greatly disturbed by a recent adventure. I went into the theatre early this morning: the moon had set in the west and the sun had not risen, yet its veiled light was brightening the sky; and, Shakspere, when I stepped upon the stage, I thought I should turn to stone with fright. I saw Philip lying on the bier, his eyes closed, dead! I saw him as plainly as I see you now! I went up

to him as close as I am to you now. I touched his hand, it was cold. Then I fled, horrified! I told Armin and Sly that our poor little friend was dead. They hurried to the stage, and, Shakspere, no one was there! But, friend, I saw with my eyes and even touched with my hands. This forebodes some awful catastrophe. Was Philip with you last night?"

Shakspere made no answer. He doubted not that Philip had died in the night. Alone at home, perhaps he had called for his sister and called in vain, with no response from her he loved best. "And Phyllis slept so quietly that even I was grieved," he said to himself with a sigh.

They mounted the stage and examined the bier. It had certainly been pulled from its place in the wings, and the draperies were somewhat disarranged.

"I am not superstitious," said Bur-

bage, "and what I saw, I saw! You can hardly blame me for dreading to know what the day may bring forth."

"I am superstitious," said Shakspere, "if that means to believe that there are secrets in heaven and earth beyond our understanding. I doubt not I shall live to rue this day. If it were any other than yourself who made the report, I should not be disturbed; but your nerves are of iron. Yet the moonlight plays strange tricks; if a ray of light fell lengthwise across the black folds——"

"Yes, it might look like a white figure, but hardly like a figure clothed in brilliant red, with pale face and hands cold to the touch."

"Well, there remains only to proceed!" exclaimed Shakspere impatiently. "Can we give up the play? The Earl of Bedford was pleased to tell the Queen of its success at his wedding celebration, and he has quoted Puck's

words of her Majesty. She wishes to hear herself described 'The moon's imperial votaress.' Every one knows that we are ready to give the play and what excuse can we offer?"

"Have you not noticed a change in Philip?" questioned Burbage, uneasily.

"Since he came with us? None. And he has been more with me than with you."

"Well, have an eye on him to-day. Bedford and Southampton have both a mind to take him from our company; but truly, I should feel as badly to have him desert us as to have him dead."

"Bedford and Southampton! Where did you learn of their plans? Bedford, indeed! He could never steal away one of my players! He lacks the wit to make his service seem attractive and starts in to make of a new man a barber. But Southampton! That is another matter. Who told you of his in-

tentions?" Shakspere was evidently disturbed.

At this moment, Phyllis came toward them. She had concealed herself in a recess near the door and appeared to have but just entered the theatre. Both men hastened to greet her.

"We have been talking of you, Philip," said Burbage. "I am not happy about you. I have a dread of secret poisoning, and it seems to me you grow paler each day."

"I am pale to-day with good reason," answered Phyllis. "I have made a grievous mistake. I must get forgiveness of Will Shakspere before I know peace again." Child that she was, she thought to be over at once with the sad matter that oppressed her.

Shakspere's eyes rested tenderly on her sweet face. "It is granted without my hearing further," he said.

"No, I must talk with you," Phyllis insisted.

"If he attempts to scold you for your fault, call on me," cried Burbage, "unless you speak of some change in your plans. We shall not excuse you from our service." So saying, he left them.

CHAPTER XXII

In which Phyllis knows not her own mind.

"SHAKSPERE," she turned to him limpid eyes swimming with tears and lips that trembled like those of a child about to weep—"Shakspere, yesterday I for-

"Thus have I had thee as a dream doth flatter;
In sleep a king, but waking, no such matter."
Sonnet LXXXVIII

got everything but you. To-day, the world crowds in upon me. Dearest, I cannot!"

"You cannot? Why, that means you will not! What will you not? Have I lost by my patience through the long night? I lay like a faithful dog before your door, not venturing to whisper for fear of disturbing your sleep! But it is not that!" He seized both her hands in his. "You do not speak of our love, for that is a heavenly thing. It is of this play you speak! You mean you cannot go on with it—you must no longer take this risk! Burbage feels it. I will send to the Queen's Players at the Cathedral for a substitute. This is of no great importance, and, dear love, if it were, you are more to me now than all else. I loved you first because you gratified my vanity and my ambition; but now because you alone can satisfy my every desire."

"Oh, Shakspere," exclaimed Phyllis, "I could not satisfy you long! Were we alone in some island of the sea, we might make our world anew; but here in the envious crowd, I should be like a jewel lying in your hand, yet not fastened to it by any ring. Every glance upon me would arouse your suspicions; for, Shakspere, you have too lively a mind to rest your faith upon a woman not lawfully bound to you. You would say at last, 'She is not faithful to the honest mother who bore her! How long will she be faithful to me?' "

He looked at her in amazement.

"Phyllis!" he exclaimed, "what change has come over you since last night? You melted into my arms, the other half of me, the dream and the song of my life became woman! I have been like one dying of thirst since I left you! What has changed you? To

whom have you spoken that has told you so falsely of me!"

"See, already you ask 'To whom have you spoken?' No one has talked to me of you. My conscience has awakened. It was drowned in the poetry and the moonlight." She would not say "I did not know"; it seemed to cast the blame on him.

"Love is too young to know what conscience is!" vowed Shakspere. "You mean that I have ceased to be the world to you! Oh, Phyllis, you cannot ask me to resign what I never claimed, and what you offered of your own will!"

"I am thinking now of your wife."

"I have had no wife these many years—and never had a mate."

"Mistress Anne?"

"Oh, Phyllis, she is far away, removed from me and from my life by her own will! She has no part in it—I have not seen her these ten years. She

played Venus to a boy Adonis for a brief space; but an accession of virtue since her marriage has made her the most rigid of Puritans. She despises my present calling, though she enjoys the fruits of it. Mistress Anne is a contented woman, happy in her children and her home, while I—must I be denied the companionship that is life's only happiness? Phyllis, the world admits the right of such a love as I feel for you!"

"The world may admit it, and so weak am I that I, too, would gladly admit it; if I could put faith in what is faithless—if I could honor what is not honorable, or if you could! But no! Listen:

I thine, thou mine! O dream too sweet
to be!
Yet 'twas the hope thy dear words
raised in me.

A blot upon thy fame's fair page to make?
Forgive me, Love! I cannot—for Love's sake!

That is my final answer. I said it over a thousand times before I fell asleep. You love me, not because I am beautiful, for you know many beautiful women. If you love me, Shakspere, it is because I try to be good and brave and true. Your soul divines the truth, even though you fail to believe it."

"You are not true—I cannot believe you!" exclaimed Shakspere. "If I had tempted you, this would be no more than I deserved. But I guarded every word. I kept my eyes away from your face and treated you as my own sister; I took you safely home. Then, Phyllis, you came back with me of your own will. You invited me to speak of love, you asked me to trust

you; you protested your faithfulness, your utter devotion; when I could not believe you, you pleaded with me to believe! And, now—oh, Phyllis, there is only one way to explain this change!" His reasoning was swept you. For very pity, deceive me again into the bliss of yesterday!"

"How can I endure this?" moaned away in his anguish—"Phyllis, I love Phyllis. "You will not understand!"

"I cannot understand."

"Return then to your own words a short time since; you said 'Juliet could face death but not disgrace.'"

"Yes, and you vowed she should have left all to follow Romeo."

"I see now, Shakspere, that you were right."

"I know that you were right, and I was wrong. But it matters not to you. At your bidding, reason hath left me. I am past cure. Your conquest of me is complete. You look now else-

where. Does my dear friend please you?"

"Oh, most unkind! You do not love me! Love could not live side by side with such base thoughts!"

"Why, how else can I justify the wrong that your unkindness lays upon my heart? Deny it, Phyllis, deny it all! Tell me what I have said is all a lie!"

"'Tis all a lie!"

"And you are true?"

"Oh, I am true, too true, alas!"

"For if I should despair, I should go mad."

"Do not despair!"

"You do not love another?"

"None but you, nor ever shall!"

"In any case, 'tis wise to tell me so!"

"It is not wise, but it is true!" and Phyllis, sobbing, threw her arms about his neck. Tears, kisses, reassuring words and tenderest reconciliation!

"What power now can save my soul

from hell?" asked Phyllis. "For here on earth, I have sinfully accepted heaven!"

And he answered, "If there be one hell, there must needs be two; for mine could only be the place where you were not!"

CHAPTER XXIII

In which Philip shows his gratitude, and Phyllis finds a champion

THE players and their friends were now thronging into the theatre.

"A brief rehearsal, good fellows," said the Lord Chamberlain, "then after breakfast

"Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel."
Sonnet I.

we will give the play. That being finished, her Majesty proposes a most liberal payment for your intelligent and very interesting services. Let nothing be hurried or ill done. We have been agreeably informed of the excellence of this comedy."

The rehearsal began forthwith. Burbage was nervous, Shakspere distraught, Phyllis as pale as marble, but oh, how lovely! Bravely she proceeded, taking with a good grace, the criticisms of the Lord Chamberlain and listening eagerly for the prompting of her lover. He had failed to instruct her at the time set, but he now supplied any forgotten word or phrase with a skill enhanced by the ardor of his passion.

When Phyllis reached the lines that described Helena's happy girlhood, her voice took on a tragic tone. Were those days gone forever? It was as

though Will Shakspere had fondly described her brother and herself:

"Both warbling of one song, both in one key,
As if our hands, our sides, voices and minds
Had been incorporate. So we grew together
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,
Two lovely berries moulded on one stem."

Looking toward the main door, her eyes dilated suddenly, and she stretched out her arms——

"Philip!" she called.

All turned. Entering the room was her double, a youth clad in scarlet, and followed by a large man in gray.

"Oh, Philip!" cried the sister, "are you strong enough to be here! You should not have left home!" Her words

came incoherently from the fullness of her heart.

But the other approached, silent, pale, so like herself that it was a marvel to all who saw. Stopping in front of the stage, he pointed at her and called, with the cry of an accusing spirit, "Come down, you scarlet woman!"

She stopped and brushed her hand over her face as one who believes not eyes and ears.

"Come down, you scarlet woman!" the young man cried again. "Living disgrace! I am here not to ask speech with you, not to ask what evil led you astray, but to cast you off utterly! I disclaim you to the world! I say that I do not believe the same mother bore us two! I come to return something of yours! Something that should have been the crown of your womanhood! Something I would have guarded for you with my life-blood, but which you

have cast away the better to carry out your shameful designs."

All looked at him in amazement as he tore open the front of his cloak.

"He is raving mad!" whispered Shakspere to Phyllis, but the girl stood mute, stricken to the soul.

And the horror in her eyes brought fear to the heart of her lover.

Then from his bosom, the youth drew forth two heavy black ropes, sinuous and glistening like beautiful serpents.

"Take them," he cried, "and since they no longer belong upon your head, tie them tight, tight about your neck! You can find no better place for them." There was a gasp of dismay from one and all, as he flung the two long, glossy braids of hair full in his sister's face.

"Young fool!" exclaimed Shakspere, hastening toward Philip. "You should be the last to do your sister such

injustice! She has tried to serve you by doing your accustomed work. She has excelled you in all the difficult arts of the player! There is no man here who knew of her sex save I myself, and you have come and betrayed all. I have lain outside her door each night, guarding her like a watch-dog! You know me, Philip! You believe me!"

So persuasive, so convincing was he that the youth stayed his onslaught. He looked around at the faces of the amazed spectators. There was genuine surprise and concern depicted on them. But no! Southampton, the merry, light-hearted friend, showed nothing but amusement. The satirical smile that played upon his lips was not reassuring. In truth, the Earl was more than a little amused. The knowledge was his that he had escorted a terrified little lady away from this ardent defender; and at sight of him,

Philip turned upon Shakspere with renewed violence.

"Nothing is sacred to you save your art!" he cried, scornfully.

"You feel not as other men. What is one poor maid more or less, so Will Shakspere's plays go on?"

And now spoke Burbage: "This is my fault! I carried the maid off by force, and had I known those braids were to be sacrificed, indeed I had never done this thing! By the Lord, Philip, I thought it was you! But I should have known! Never did you play with such passion and such fire!"

"Doubtless, she is well taught by this time," cried Philip, "but I care not! What she is you have made her, she is nothing to me."

"Peace, Philip!" commanded Shakspere angrily, but enough cruel words had already been spoken; and with a little despairing sob, Phyllis sank to

the ground. Human nature could endure no more after the mental anguish and physical effort of the past three days. Shakspere started toward her, involuntarily; Burbage and not a few others were anxious to proffer assistance; but the Puritan, who had stood a silent witness of the scene, was quicker than they and waved them aside angrily.

"Stand back, you pack of wolves!" he said. "There's not one among you who is not ready to seize and devour this dove that a loved hand has killed. Philip, Philip, you must answer for this! Why did I let you come here to murder this poor girl!"

The Puritan seemed almost beside himself. He stood looking down on Phyllis's hardly conscious form as though not daring to touch her; his lips trembled and tears fell from his eyes. She lay waiting for his final curse, like a crimson rose, broken from the stem

and cast aside to wither on the ground. Rage filled him against them one and all that they should even look upon her in this plight. Removing the gray cape that hung from his shoulders, he draped it tenderly about her and then raised her to her feet. The voluminous folds completely enveloped the scarlet figure which was in a moment transformed into the fairest and most piteous of Puritan maidens. There was something so womanlike—nay, so childlike about her that she won the sympathy of the crowd in the very instant, and a murmur of indignation against Philip arose.

But here the master player took himself in hand. His passion for Phyllis was tempered by the long affection he had borne her brother. The worldly interests of all demanded that the startling scene now being enacted should give place to the rehearsal. At almost any moment, Lord Hunsdon

might announce her Majesty and the Court. What would be the excitement if Revelation Reeves should express himself before the laughing lords and ladies of the retinue? If Phyllis were discovered by the Queen? by Mistress Vernon? by those gentlemen who were already too well pleased with her? Shaking off the spell that had seemed to tie his tongue, he began to issue directions and orders that should bring an end to the chaos.

"Here, Philip—enough of private spleen—put on Helena's robes—our play is about to begin! You, Puritan, that seem also an honest man, bear this maid home and leave the brother in her stead. Our Queen must be amused, and come what may, Will Shakspere's plays go on! Here, Sly, some cordial! Philip is weak and sees all things amiss! And while he revives, shall we let his sister go without a word? No, no! Our heartfelt thanks are due! Our

thanks to Lady Juliet! She is the first to show us woman's rightful place upon the English stage. When men and women work together, we shall see the perfection of our art, as we have already seen it in her!"

The Puritan was leading Phyllis toward the door. When they reached it, she turned and looked back toward the players. Her eyes were filled with tears, she could not see, but she held out her arms with a hopeless but appealing gesture toward the sound of the beloved voice. And Shakspere, turning, caught that mute appeal, and suddenly his lips were dumb. For a moment, the two retreating figures were framed in glowing sunlight. Phyllis faltered on the step, and the Puritan's arms were about her when the closing door shut out the golden day.

To the master player the great hall

was deserted. The many moving figures were but shadows and phantoms. Happiness, a very dear reality, had passed by, and he must forever watch joy from far.

FROM the difficulties that beset the author in tracing further the life of the player maid, it seems probable that there ceased to be a Mistress Phyllis soon after she passed out from the portals of Whitehall with the Puritan. If the truth of such a surmise be granted, we may associate her later life with that of the lovely Philomela, a married woman whose beauty formed the theme of more than one poet's praise, and whose virtue was especially extolled by the poet Shakspere.

Though her personal history is indefinite and uncertain, the result of her

adventure is not so. The appearance of women on the English stage gradually followed her escapade. Only a few weeks after the players had left Whitehall, the Queen's maids of honor took part in one of the masques or playlets of the Court. It is authentically reported that the witty Elizabeth felt much amusement at the sight of Mistress Vernon in the rôle of Charity, and that she commented upon the peculiar fitness with which that lady assumed a part that covered a multitude of sins.

Concerning the charming Southampton, we must note the fact that though he was induced to follow Essex to the wars in Spain, his good heart brought him back to marry the lady who so dearly loved him and who had sacrificed so much for him. As he had anticipated, his generous and courageous action caused him to be confined

for a year in the Tower, and lost him forever the friendship of his sovereign.

And now a final word as to our poet, player and man among men. If we have shown in this simple tale that he was one of those world favorites, loved in his own time as well as by posterity for all time, then we come to the end of our story content, though a little sorry to part from this "goodly companie."

The End